Four Quarters

Volume 206
Number 2 *Four Quarters (Second Series): Fall 1992*
Vol. 6, No. 2

Article 1

9-1992

Four Quarters (Second Series): Fall 1992 Vol. 6, No. 2

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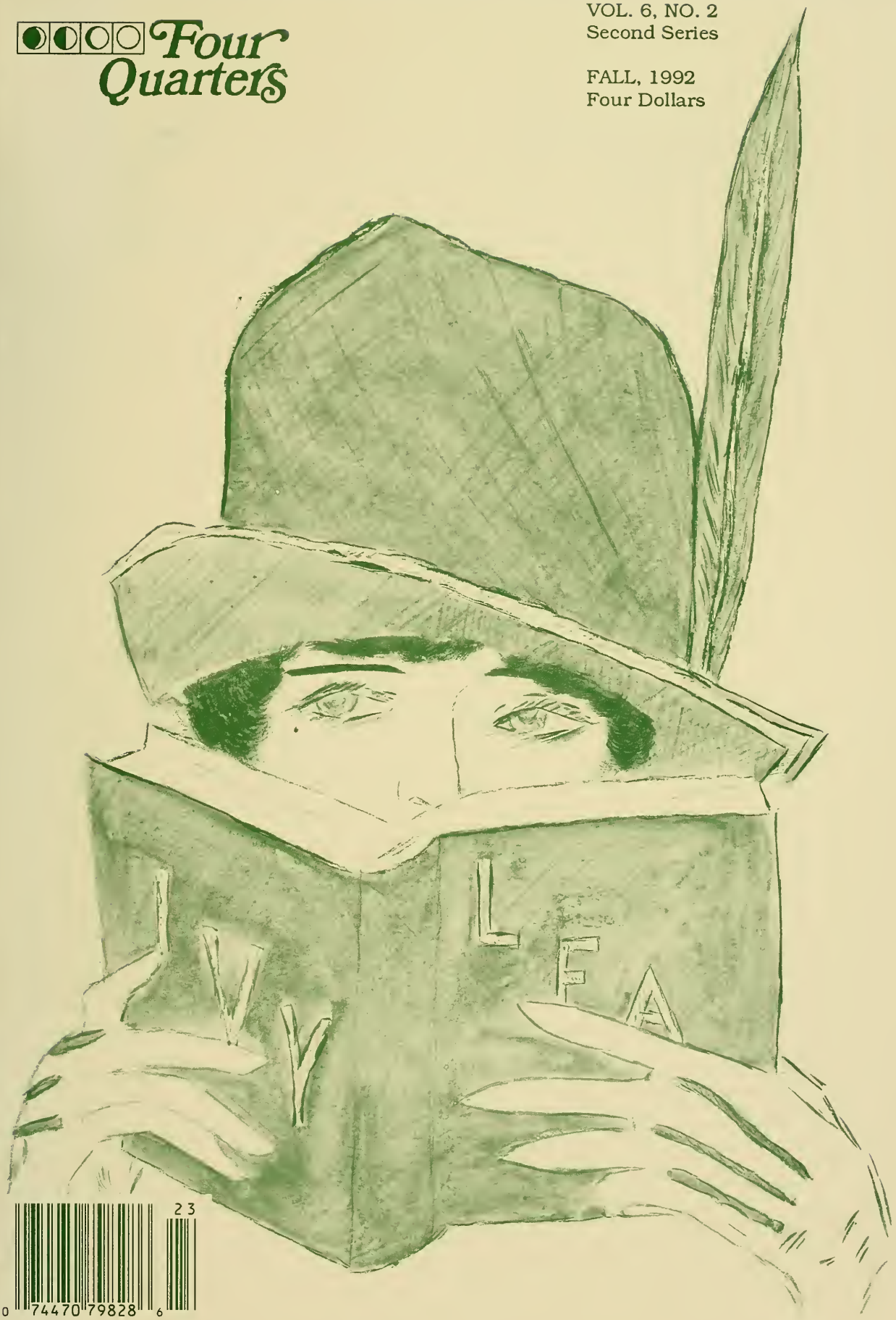
VOL. 6, NO. 2
Second Series

FALL, 1992
Four Dollars



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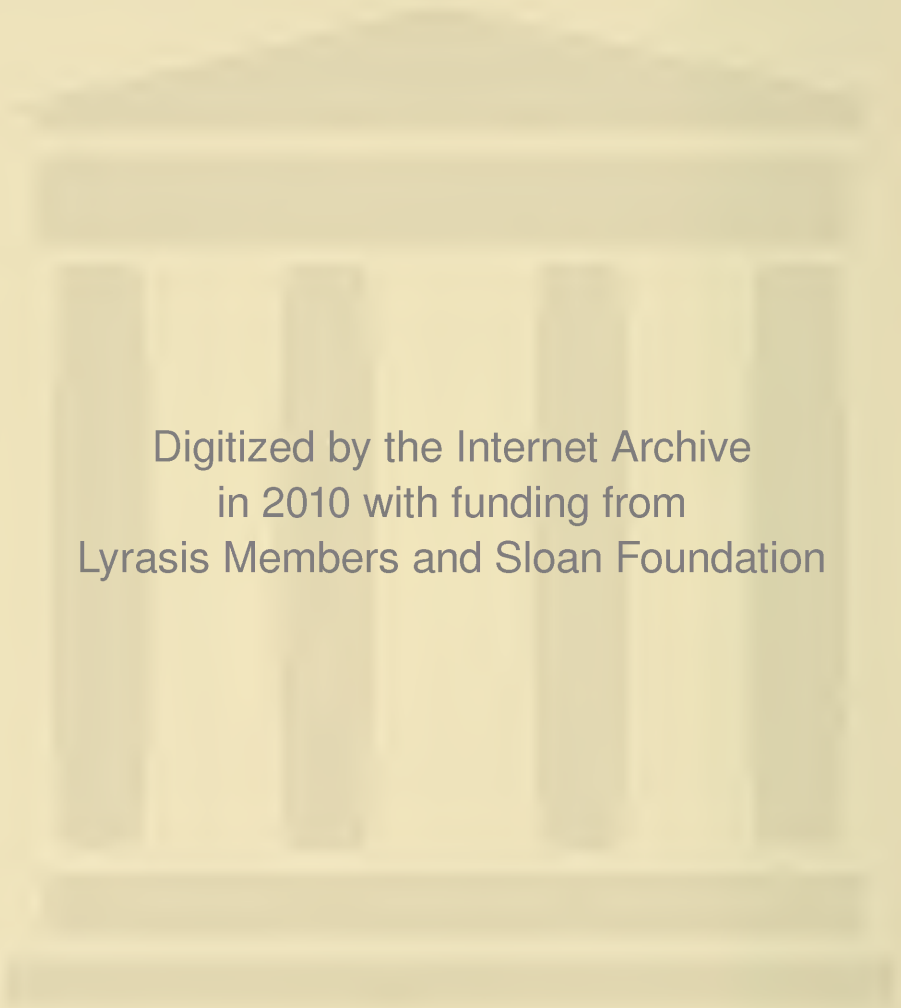

Four Quarters

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2, SECOND SERIES FALL, 1992

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CONTRIBUTORS

COVER "The Woman in Green," (pencil and water color) Anonymous, (1911). Reprinted with the permission of John Christopher Kleis.

FOUR QUARTERS (ISSN-0015-9107) is published semiannually in the Spring and Fall by the faculty of La Salle University, 1900 W. Olney Ave.,Philadelphia, PA 19141. Four dollars per copy. Subscriptions: $8.00 for one year; $13.00 for two years.

Quarter Notes

ROBERT F. PEASE

The Writer

In the same way white-bellied deer mice invade a country home as winter nears, the need to put words to paper has crept up on Alex, found entrance, slipped inside. He is unaware of when it started, barely sensed a change at first—something scurrying in places he couldn't reach or see.

He grew up loving stories, read to by his mother; learned to read, himself, when very young. There was a time, he was in kindergarten, when he wrote what he called a story—"The buffalo is a very serious thing..." His mother saved it. He has it still. Was that the beginning? Do lifelong needs, compulsions, habits have their origins so early?

The written word held fascination for him from the start.

He was a quiet child, a timid adolescent, an often tongue-tied shy young man. Perhaps that's why he loved to read—because things set down in writing could be clear and unambiguous. It could be that he saw a way to speak and be heard, as a writer, a way which he would never find on his feet.

He arrives in Paris in 1947, three years in the War, in the Air Force, behind him, a degree from Columbia after discharge. He enrolls in the Sorbonne, will read everything in contemporary French literature in the next few years, will learn to speak French like a Parisian. And he will begin, determinedly, to write.

He knows now that this is the thing he will do. He is clear-headed enough to understand that he will probably never earn a living at it. That doesn't bother him. In fact, he has already decided that there are real dangers in earning a living doing the thing you love. You don't do it for money. If you should happen to get paid for it, for something you have written, that should come as an agreeable surprise, should not be expected or anticipated, because then you might slant your writing, shift focus, betray the thing in which you believe.

So he asks himself—To become a writer, what should I do? Can writing be taught? Instinct tells him that first and foremost he must write and write and write.

You learn by doing, he believes. An instructor can lecture you for a year on how to hit a baseball and you can read a dozen books on the subject, but it's when you take a bat in hand and start to swing at a pitched ball that you begin to learn how to hit.

So he writes something every day. He writes in English and in French. There is a process he doesn't understand, a mysterious joining of thought and word, which is the same in both languages. Facility increases, whichever one he used. It's a pathway overgrown with cat brier and nettles which must be opened and kept cleared. You need to walk it daily and forever hack back the vines and suckers that sprout

there until little by little it grows wider and smoother and you move freely and with confidence and you start asking yourself the next question—Have I anything to say?

But he's not there yet. He's still struggling, waiting in ambush before the blank page—*Le vide papier que la blancheur défend*. Yes, he's steeped in Mallarmé already, and Rimbaud and Baudelaire and Gérard de Nerval and Verlaine. So many Titans! He's reading everyone—Sartre and Bernanos and Gide and Camus, Maupassant, Malraux: theater, fiction. Too few American for now. Maybe all these other voices confuse him, but can the influence be bad when such giants speak?

If there is nothing assigned for one of his classes and he's answered all the letters and he has no ideas for a story or a poem, he looks at what his daily life holds and there is always some incident, some confrontation, some oddity to be recounted or described.

In his rooming house a fiftyish almost-dwarf of a woman is the chambermaid. Her name is Rose. She goes through the whole building every day making beds, sweeping, cleaning, washbowls, doing the halls and the stairs and the toilets. Rarely does she find anything to do in Alex's room. He thinks she likes him for that, and because he never treats her like a servant.

One morning she knocks and comes in when he is about to go out and his wallet is lying on the table.

She spots it. She squints up at him out of old mischievous eyes and says, "You better not leave it there. I could take it."

Alex sees that she has something she wants to tell him. "Rose," he says, "You don't mean to tell me that you do things like that."

She titters and all her small frame trembles. *"Ah, Monsieur Alex, vous savez*...that fellow who was in number nine. He's gone now. He was Moroccan. He came to Paris just to make a little black market. He had plenty of money. Well, one day he brought a woman here. They had agreed upon the price before, but afterward, he said, he didn't want to give her that much, so while she was getting dressed he took most of the bills out of his wallet and put them under the mattress. Then, when she was ready to go, he opened the billfold and said, *"Tiens*, that seems to be all I have left." She was furious. They had a terrible row. She called him every bad thing a man can be—one or two I had never heard before. She was screaming. Everyone in the house heard it, too. In the end, though, she went away."

"But Rose," Alex asks, "Why would he tell you about the money?"

"Oh, *Monsieur*, he had to. I came in later to make up his room and I found all that money. He was so excited he went off and forgot. And me, until he came back that night, I had all that huge wad of bills in my pocket."

She chuckles, reliving the moment, her eyes squeezed smaller than ever. *"Pensez-vous,"* she adds, with all that

money on me, *je me suis imaginé bien des choses*—I dreamed all kinds of things."

Alex writes that all out in French. He does it again in English. One is not a translation of the other. Should it be? He thinks not. But if he puts English words into Rose's mouth, should she sound like a French person speaking English? Should he indicate an accent? But Rose doesn't know five words in English. By the same token, if he leaves whole phrases in French, what will an English-speaking person make of it?

There are no answers that satisfy him. Only more questions. The essential thing, though, is to keep trying, to go on putting the words together, to get something down and then look at it, test it, listen to it, do it again.

○○○○

JOSEPH P. COOGAN

Your Car's A Star!

It was the beginning of a "chase." Eddie Murphy hopped into the passenger side of an old, battered pickup truck that whirled away from the curb, whipped into a tight U-Turn and, tires screeching, roared off down a side street near the White House. Except it wasn't really Eddie Murphy. It was Kelly D. Summerfield, one of his stand-ins. And it wasn't anywhere near the White House. It was some 300 miles away in Harrisburg on North Street near the State Capitol. And the truck moved only about twenty or thirty feet before backing up into position to go through the action again. And again. And again. And again. And...

I was standing in the hot sun on a street corner with a crowd of what looked like bureaucrats and tourists, all extras in "The Distinguished Gentleman," a comedy about a con man who bluffs his way into Congress *(Cinema Verité?)*. At 8 a.m. we had reported along with our cars (mine was to become notorious) to a garage in downtown Harrisburg, were taken by van to a "holding area" in one of the Capitol buildings and then led to the scene of the escaping truck. Very few of us were close to the action and, though not allowed to leave the location, weren't called upon to do anything until almost noon.

It was my first time as a movie extra. Along with most members of AFTRA (American Federation of Television and Radio Actors) I had been asked to a few auditions for commercials in the past year and had just flunked one that called for a "loony old coot." My wife was startled. ("You mean there actually was someone loonier and cootier?") This job would give us a chance to visit with my nephew, who lives in Harrisburg, and help pay my union dues. Not that it pays much. About twelve dollars an hour

straight time, time-and-a-half after eight hours, then double time. Non-union extras got a flat fifty dollars.

Who are extras? All kinds of people. You, probably, if you want to be. Because soaring production costs often make shooting on location less expensive than building elaborate sets, and because every state has eager salespeople fighting for the opportunity, more and more towns and cities—and, of course, their hotels, bars, and restaurants—find themselves playing host to Hollywood actors and film crews. (Not long ago Martin Scorcese was looking for a thousand people to form an "audience" at Philadelphia's Academy of Music.) So don't be surprised if a man sitting in a canvas chair and holding a bullhorn pops up in your neighborhood surrounded by hundreds of bewildered looking people. If you decide to join them, you may find this account helpful. The oldest of "our" extras was well over seventy, the youngest, stroller-borne, was somewhere between one and two and was accompanied by his mother. (only he and Eddie Murphy got chauffeured from one location to another.) I learned a few things I'd never thought of from some of the experienced extras.

Dress Code: One man was indignant when he saw a woman dressed in a bright blouse and fireman-red skirt. "That's *so* unprofessional," he said. "We're *background*, for God's sake, we're supposed to *blend*. If I were the director I'd throw her off the set." There were , however, a fair number of extras who didn't agree with him. One saw young and sexy outfits on some far from young women, and some men "tourists" who looked as if they'd stepped out of Beverly Hills Hillbillies.

"The Method" Extra: One man talking to another: "It's hot. Inside the car is like an oven, I'm supposed to be stuck in traffic. As I sit in my car I let myself get mad. I get furious. I remember a lot of old hates and frustration and I *use* those feelings. My attitude shows it." His "role" is just to sit in a car. That's it.

"Appearing With...": Some people I talked to actually had a recognizable (if fleeting) appearance in a movie. One man had been in a scene with Michael Caine: "He walked by me while I was sitting on a park bench. I was reading a newspaper." Another with John Malkovich: "He was dancing in a night club and there was only one other couple on the floor. I was the man." And two people in a group I was in got to walk by Eddie Murphy as he came down the steps of one of the State office buildings in the Capitol Complex.

After we had finished our noontime assignment—walking about ten feet along a pavement—about ten of us who'd been asked to bring overcoats with us were herded over to a small park near the office building where we sat, coats in lap, for almost an hour. Except for the two who walked past Murphy that's all we did. While we were there hundreds of spectators showed up behind the yards of yellow ribbon with the words "Stay behind this line" on them. When Eddie Murphy appeared on the top steps of the building the crowd went wild—shouting "We love you Eddie," howling, squealing, hopping up

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and down. Murphy, hundreds of feet away, waved and smiled and the noise crescendoed. Several assistant directors told the crowd they had to be quiet or leave. Instantly, you could hear a pin drop. The sudden silence seemed a bit weird.

After the scene was shot, we went back to the "holding area" for lunch. Excellent food: stuffed pork chops, blackened fish, pasta, any number of salads. Then we were taken back to the garage to pick up our cars and assemble on one of the side streets. Setting up the shot took awhile. Like about three hours. And there were frequent delays between shots. The final scene I drove in began shooting at about five o'clock. A traffic jam. Mine was the third car from the corner. The battered truck (apparently this was part of the same chase) pulled around the corner and stopped briefly beside me as I drove forward, almost ramming into the car in front of me. The truck then snaked between two cars, drove down the sidewalk, stopped, and another "Eddie Murphy," a stunt double, tumbled out. But daylight ended before the final shots could be taken, and the drivers were asked to return the next day if possible. But I had promised to spend that day at my nephew's.

The next morning, however, just to be absolutely sure it was OK, I called the Central Casting office in Harrisburg to report to Carol Ness, the charming, efficient young woman who was our ultimate leader. "Thank God!" she said. "Where are you? I've left at least eight messages on your answering machine in Philadelphia, called you hour after hour until I left the office at eleven-thirty last night. We're desperate for you."

Well, not for *me*, as it turned out, but for my 1984, silver-gray Toyota Celica which, because it's highly visible in the scene, could not be eliminated from the finishing shots. She had tried every Toyota dealer for miles around but no one could come up with an identical substitute. "Your car's a star! If you could just supply it with another driver?" she'd asked on one of the eight or so messages she'd left on my answering machine, forgetting for the moment, I suppose, my own leading man quality. I preferred another of the messages. "Is there any way I can *coax* you to come back?"

Well, Carol, now that you mention it, there is. If that hambone Toyota, currently preening itself in the driveway, is so important, there is the little matter of appropriate billing. Something like:

COOGAN'S CAR

and

Eddie Murphy

in

THE DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN

Let's do lunch and dialogue it.

CARL LINDNER

The Administrator and the Back Burner Stove

It was a stove
unlike all others,
dozens of burners
and all in back,
so far back
we couldn't even see them,
could only take
the cook's word
they were even there
and what was cooking on them,
skillets and pots and kettles
all going merrily, a whole
banquet at once, delights
beyond belief, enough
to make us lick
our lips, enough
to make our palates water.
He was preparing a feast.
He was cooking
all the time on this
one-of-a-kind stove.
Even as we slept,
he kept cooking
on those burners in back,
cooking up one thing
after another for us
who kept getting hungrier
to see and taste
what he would dish up
for us when the time came.
Whenever we asked him "When?"
he smiled "Not yet" and hurried
off to his soups and stews.
He said a lot
of things, brandishing
ladles and spoons, sharpening
knives, bustling about
under his high, white, puffy hat.

SUSAN LINEHAN

Po Valley, 1963

Dawn-black bulk against an east
of goldpink yearning to be blue,
a solitary belfry intercepts the day-break
out of reach beyond scratched-to-gritty
compartment windows, blurry at first through gritty
all-night eyes.

Fuzzy all-night ears
puzzle the muted morning. Passengers murmur
in levelled Italian.
Pale cubicle lamps waver, yellow fading
into white noise enfolding
stale-life breakfast leavings
of pear cores and panini crumbs

Across a field horizoned with silhouetted cypress
the belfry sharpens, cradles
its crisply profiled bell.
Its measured tolling caught outside of time,
keen edges slice the morning
into reverent silences, unaware
of travellers passing
into the sound of change.

SUSAN LINEHAN

No Seaweed I

White sand bluffs: in the far of sky
a blue glider amazes a hovering hawk
in the nearer distance. The plane
circles, soars under scudding clouds.

On the beach below, white crests of waves
roll unresisting seaweed in and out
at their own measured will. I squint against the sun
to follow aerial arabesques, celtic loops
and swirls, free pattern in the afternoon.

Sand shifts under my feet. I turn
and up the slope I see a man
Khaki-coated, intent, motionless:
only his fingers play, almost imperceptible,
over radio controls. The antenna of his concentration spins
a taut, invisible cord
binding himself to that freedom turned
suddenly absent.

Shift of gestalt, tilt of perspective.
Like Alice, the hawk grows, glider shrinks:
Sudden parity of sizing: predator and prey.
I turn again towards the joyful glider. The hawk
hangs still, hungry. She sizes strange
possibilities of lunch.

The glider dances with glee at the man's commands,
swoops, magnificent dragonfly. The hawk considers
men's toys, decides that they fail as acceptable
morsels, and (imperceptible flick of wing) departs
over the trees.

I look along line of bluff
where the trail curves beckoning
into fern-furnished ravine and follow, leaving behind
the guided glider, the khaki man
and the waves.

An Essay by

JEANETTE BALDWIN

Hotel Auschwitz

In the summer of 1990, at the border-crossing from Austria to Czechoslovakia, the sign did not say Czechoslovakia, but Bratislava, the name of the Slovak border city. My husband and I wondered why the sign did not announce Czechoslovakia—were the Slovaks not proud of being in Czechoslovakia? After seeing Bratislava, we were convinced that Slovaks indeed had no reason to cherish the union with Czechs.

Bratislava was utterly neglected: battered roads, old Austria-Hungarian cobbles out of whack, ugly new high-rises that had never been quite finished and were at least twenty years old, and ancient, elegant buildings with roofs caving in and mortar severely damaged. Even the royal palace in Bratislava was in a sorry shape, and the feeble renovation that seemed to be going on was clearly done incompetently—the mortar placed on the bricks was the modern kind. Bratislava was the capital of the Hungarian kingdom when the Turks had occupied most of Hungary, including Budapest, in the 16th and 17th centuries. Surely, Bratislava deserves more respect, for its present, as the capital of Slovakia, as well as for its past.

The image of ravaged Bratislava became a sore in my mind when I saw how Prague, the Czech capital, was thriving, polished, freshly painted and even gilded. We walked over the majestic Karlovy bridge, admiring the beautiful, perfectly restored—or preserved—architecture on both sides of the river.

"I am going to practice Czech democracy, our velvet revolution!" a thin man shouted. "I am going to strip before you." Bulging dresden-blue eyes, flushed red in the face, he unzipped his tan trousers. Before, people had been uninterested and a glance had been enough, now they thronged in hundreds. As a native Slav, familiar with the basics of most Slavic tongues, my husband translated.

The young man pulled up his trousers above his knee and shook his buttocks. He said, "All right, I've stripped." The crowd was disappointed that he wouldn't be naked in front of them, and some people left. But the show was only beginning. His shins revealed two dangling puppets. On the left knee was a communist dressed in blue worker's clothing. On his right knee was a woman heavily painted with western makeup, dressed like a whore.

He made the dolls dance, jerking the strings that controlled them, dancing himself. "Both dolls are named *Bieda*!" (misery or poverty in Czech). "This is the old Bieda." He jerked the worker. "And the new Bieda." He jerked the whore. He was himself a picture of misery in his worn clothing. The weak phonograph played a waltz. "What wonderful satire," my husband commented. "He's comparing the revolution with teasing—strip-tease. Of course, he hasn't undressed. And the Czech revolution has stopped short too."

In Prague, tourists crowded crystal shops, Jewish cemeteries, outdoor cafes, restaurants, bridges, pantomime shows, and there was an air of joy—"the unbearable lightness of being," unbearable when compared with the exhausted and depressed look of Bratislava. Prague was not quite ready for its sudden glory, the tens of thousands of tourists. We barely found accommodations on the outskirts, behind a beer-pub. We slept in beer barrels.

From Prague we drove on to Poland. My husband and I entered Poland from the Southwest, passing many lakes along a narrow highway lined with poplars. We swam in several cold lakes—all were so polluted with chemicals that you couldn't see your feet in knee-deep water. We drove toward Krakow a hundred kilometers, through small villages, and looked for a restaurant. Since there was not much traffic, driving could have been relaxing, if it hadn't been for vodka and beer. Swerving to avoid a man who staggered in our lane, I gasped: simultaneously, a bus crossed over the center line, side-stepping in the manner of the drunken pedestrian. It still seems to me a miracle—almost as great as that of the immaculate conception—that we didn't run over the man or crash into the bus. Our mirror brushed his sleeve.

"These trees," Josip said, "are dangerous. There's no way to avoid a crash." The shady trees flanking the highway that made the drive pleasant to the eyes didn't do so much for the nerves—they clamped the highway so that in a pinch you couldn't aim for a ditch, the way I do in Nebraska and South Dakota. We didn't find a restaurant until we reached an industrial town, Tichy, where, in a four-star restaurant, we feasted on mushroom soup, steak, rice, and gourmet vegetables for under two dollars. We could have stayed in an elegant hotel above the restaurant for ten dollars, but I don't know what exactly to blame for not staying—perhaps the Austrian beer or *Let's Go Europe*, which recommended Hotel Auschwitz, some thirty kilometers away. I was curious to find out who would sleep there and how it would be. We drove on dark poorly-marked roads. The industrial smog was so thick that the highways were covered under a layer of dust. Sunk in the midst of the Polish industrial zone that worked like a huge gas chamber was the original concentration camp, proclaiming work would free the soul *(Arbeit macht frei)*.

When we parked the car in the pitch darkness, an obese man breathed heavily with asthma or emphysema—it seemed he would collapse and die of a heart attack. Almost everybody living in the industrial zones of Poland has lung problems. He gave us a parking permit for the night and showed us where to go. The hotel used to be the reception area for prisoners, and judging from the old pictures, not much had changed in the appearance of the hotel. So as a guest you have the dubious privilege to retrace the victims' steps through the oak door, to the reception, and up the stairs. A double room in the hotel was cramped. The place stank of soap as though the Poles had tried to wash away the atrocities, but that only worsened things because it reminded you that the Germans made soap from the people whom they had killed in the camp. The beds were so narrow that Josip and I had to sleep separately. All night long guests wandered though the halls, whispering and slamming doors. I was terrified and didn't get a wink of sleep. Speaking of a haunted house...

Near the buildings where the Nazis exterminated four million people, I expected to hear the screams of the dead. After three months of travel, sometimes I would wake up in the night, panicky, because I had forgotten where I went to sleep, which country. Sometimes that night I thought that I was asleep and having a nightmare; my elbow would fly out seeking the wall, to make sure I was not at Auschwitz. But the cold wall was there, and I was awake.

Almost the whole camp has been preserved, rows and rows of houses, dungeons. Most of the original red-bricked buildings at Auschwitz were now a museum, a grim reminder of Nazi orderliness. In one building, an exhibit illustrating the network of concentration camps throughout Europe, showed Jasenovac in Yugoslavia to have been a mere holding camp, where prisoners—Jews, Gypsies, and Serbs—were collected for relocation to work or extermination camps. More than 50,000 people were killed in Jasenovac; it definitely had been more than a holding camp. Many other unrecognized camps were probably used for extermination as well. Hitler's campaign exploited national tensions throughout Eastern Europe, the Slovaks against the Czechs, the Croats against the Serbs. In the next building, while we watched the victims' personal belongings—mounds of suitcases, wire-rim glasses, and hair—the power went off, and we were left in pitch, humid blackness. I gasped, tripping down the stairs, feeling the walls until I reached sunlight outdoors.

On the Polish border in Zakopane we found private lodging for fifty cents. After seeing our car with Austrian plates (rent-a-car), the mother, an old widow, shrewdly tripled the price. We accepted the "inflated" price; she hurriedly had us hide our car in the barn, so that she wouldn't be reported to the Communists (she wasn't aware that the communist regime had ended several months before, so accustomed was she to oppression). Our room in daylight appeared clean and orderly with fresh sheets and polished wood floors. From an outdoor well, she drew a pan of rusty water for us to both drink from and bathe in.

The area was known for its sheepskin jackets, so Josip asked whether he could buy one. Nodding her head excitedly, she brought out the skin of a just slaughtered lamb, all blood drenched. We declined the lamb skin, but we accepted her offer of food, knowing how fresh the lamb would be. But four hours later, after ten o' clock in the evening, we went downstairs through the barn beneath our room and into the kitchen where the old woman was still cooking. Yes, she told us. She would bring the food to us. After midnight we fell asleep. At precisely three A.M., a sudden loud banging awoke us as the old woman brought plates of stringy, well cooked lamb to us in bed. She appeared shocked that we were sleeping, leaving soon after, disappointed by our lack of patience and appetite. I attempted to eat the food, but it had been cooked beyond recognition, so I left the half-empty plate at the bedside. During the night, rats kept jumping on the table and even on our bed. I screamed. No longer able to sleep, I listened to the wolves howling in the hills nearby. In the morning Josip told me that he had listened to the rats scratching and gnawing the wooden walls till dawn. There was no bathroom in the house, so

we had to use an outhouse along the wall of the barn—the ground floor with sheep, rabbits, and hay. The drop from the elevated outhouse ended on the flat ground, where flies buzzed happily over piles of excrement. Suffering from indigestion and constipation, we crossed the Polish border soon afterwards into Slovakian ever-green mountains, where tree tops collapsed from acid-rain.

In Yugoslavia we visited a concentration camp, Jasenovac, outside of Zagreb. All of the buildings had been removed from the original encampment; a monument, blazing white, had been erected, resembling a burning flame. There were mounds of dirt which may have been graves; it wasn't clear. Inside the museum, tools for torture, hatchets, photos of the dead and personal items entombed in display exhibits told the history from the partisan viewpoint. In addition, the museum offered a movie, accompanied with an oral history of Jasenovac. The director shut us into a room, and engulfed in the black, we waited for the documentary. My stomach curled as I saw bulldozers ploughing mounds of people into the dirt. A small Serbian child kept moaning, "Mommy let me out of here, mommy let me out!" Josip was upset, and said: "That's Dachau, footage from Dachau. They sneaked it into the genuine scenes from the war Croatia, and nowhere do they indicate that the footage is from elsewhere—so that the viewers would assume it had all taken place here. This is Serbian-dominated communist propaganda, an organized guilt trip for the Croats." Outside the museum, you could see no evidence of a concentration camp. The village near the camp was the most impoverished Yugoslav village I saw. It stank of pigs and manure. The peasants drew water from outdoor wells. Storks lived on most chimneys. There were hardly any paved roads there.

According to Josip's mother, his father was a Croatian soldier in the Second World War; he had already been in the army before the war; the army changed leadership, and he was forced to remain as a regular soldier or be shot by the ustashas, the Croat version of the SS. Later, he deserted, enlisting with the Partisans. The Partisans, distrusting any defectors from the enemy camps, put them on the front line, to overtake the German machine-gun nests—they died quickly. So his father defected again, and spent a year on the run. After the war, the partisans herded him with their war prisoners—guilty and innocent alike—and chased them across the country until the end of the run, where he was to be shot; but the partisans needed a shoemaker, and let him live and work for them for two years for nothing.

I spoke with an old Serbian woman, Josip's' brother's mother-in-law, who told me she was ill from the war. Six times the soldiers had put a gun to her and passed on. "The Nazis," she said, "would come into the village and kill everyone, but often there would be two soldiers who would run ahead and warn people." She fled, having been warned; behind her in the village, two thousand people were killed, slowly by stabbing and after laying them in a ditch, pouring mortar over the bodies where some lived for four days among the dead. Another time, the German soldiers came to her village, rounded up the most beautiful women—she was one—to formally dine with wine goblets, linen, servants and musicians. When the feast was over, the officers gallantly

took them home. During the meal the infantry had slaughtered fifty villagers. And once she was working in the barn when a black cat ran in, carrying a chicken head. Immediately she hid, knowing that the Nazis had chopped off the chicken's head because they were hungry. After they had eaten, they would go through the village killing peasants in retaliation: ten per each German soldier killed. Years after the war, she waited five years to get an apartment, because she wouldn't sleep with an old partisan who assigned the apartments. Once a Yugoslav friend declared very proudly on the terrace of an outdoor cafe, "My grandfather fought in the war for the Germans, and they are the superior race. The Germans and the Jews are the superior races, followed by the English, and we Croats, because we are Slavs, are pretty low down the list, but still above the Serbs, who are a mixture of Slavs and Turks."

Nationalism was on the rise last summer in Yugoslavia—and you could feel it would get worse. In Daruvar, a town of 12,000, located in Slavonia, a region of Serbs and Croats, the people are divided by ethnic tension. Daruvar has a Jewish cemetery, situated on the far side of a park of beech trees. The cemetery is isolated; lovers meet on the black tombstones. The weedy place with only a few plots tended has burning candles inside red lanterns set on the marble tombstones. Before the war, there had been several hundred Jews in Daruvar; after war there were fewer than ten Jews left. Not all the tombs have bodies beneath them. Many tombstones bear the names of those whose bodies were incinerated in the concentration camps; some of the tombstones have more than three dozen names engraved. One tombstone was violently overthrown and cut at its base, and it lay in the gravel on the side of the cemetery. I wondered who did that. Other tombstones, chipped, faced the East.

The possibility of a new war looms over Slavonia in Croatia. During the last summer, the Croats dug skulls out of the earth, thousands of them, to show what atrocities the Partisans committed at the end of the war. Tito had supposedly made a pact with Churchill to grant amnesty to forty thousand Croatian troops and then Tito changed his mind so that the soldiers who left the trains in Austria, believing they were safe, were strafed, and the partisans on tractors ploughed them into the ground before the British arrived. And this summer, I have heard that many roads in Slavonia are torn and bridges destroyed. The trip we took last year wouldn't be possible this year.

While Josip toured the Soviet Union, I went to a lake in the southern Alps in Slovenia. Disheartened with nationalism and the war, in a book-store in Ljubljana, I purchased Albert Camus' *The Rebel*. Reading the essay on the shores of a crystalline lake, surrounded by fat, wealthy Germans, I sank into depression.

Camus' introduction poignantly states, "We shall be capable of nothing until we know whether we have the right to kill our fellowman, or the right to let them be killed. Since all contemporary action leads to murder, direct or indirect, we cannot act until we know whether, and why, we have the right to kill."

No, I do not believe we have the right to kill. I am left with the puzzling question: How do I prevent killing? Should we imprison those who kill or desire to kill? If trying to stop them means that we ourselves will be killed, only the

survivors, those who kill, are left. What legacy does that leave the world? And if we choose not to hear the cries of those who suffer degradation, are we not equally culpable, the murderers? Man stinks of the blood of slaughterhouses.

The Poles are plagued with escalating drug addiction from home-brewed opiates. The youth are contracting AIDS from dirty needles, and there is no existing health care system capable of coping with the tragedy. A rising population of the homeless, destitute, and ill sleep in the streets and alleys. At the finale of his essay, Camus foresaw the direction Europe would take in the aftermath of two brutal wars in the same century. Camus writes, "At the climax of contemporary tragedy, we therefore, become intimates of crime. The sources of life and of creation seem exhausted. Fear paralyzes a Europe peopled with phantoms and machines.... What cry would ever trouble them? (*The Rebel* 243)."

The new executioners— drugs, illness, and poverty— have arrived, The souls of nations like Poland, a border between East and West during the war were battered, and afterwards abandoned to Communism, a creed which helped military dictators enslave the people in the name of freedom. What will save these countries? I remember seeing in the streets of Krakow a priest bending low, his skirts scraping the dusty sidewalk, giving money to a beggar. That beggar has become a metaphor for Eastern Europe, but I wonder, are we Americans the priest? And what can we offer? Money? Blessings? Moralizing?

OOOO

KALIDAS MISRA

Possession

Don't ask me
for the word;
I've only a few
splinters of a poem,
tatters of dreams,
a little firewood
to enkindle this life.

CARLA RYAN

Damn the Birds

Damn the birds that sing in the trees,
The whistle of trains in the night,
Damn the rivers that swell in the Spring,
The scent of magnolias in summer.
My face is falling. I forget!
Damn.

Damn mothers' love and nursery rhymes,
Good food and wine, warm fires on cold nights.
Damn fresh fallen snow,
Moonlight on water.
My eyesight is failing. I can't hear!
Damn.

Damn tiny violets and red roses, daffodils too.
Sweethearts and Valentine's Day.
Damn blue skies and gentle breezes,
A rainbow after the shower.
My eyelids droop. My skin is wrinkled!
Damn.

Damn shelter, a lover's lips,
The shade and the sunshine.
Damn a calm sea, white beaches,
A good friend, a helping hand.
My pubic hair is getting gray!
Damn.

SAMUEL HAZO

En Route

Starting, you memorize the names
of streets you leave behind.
You tag and tally passing
neighborhoods, the titles of tunnels,
and mileage totals clocking by
like birthdays.
Nothing, not even
the long since struck and stiffening
doe you swerve to miss, escapes you.
You live enchained in the fuel-
injected, air-conditioned country
of car.
Mile by minute
you learn the language of car,
the Farenheit of car, the straight
philosophy of car...
Midway
to where you never know you're going,
you start to think in hours,
then mornings, afternoons and nights,
then simply light and dark.
Tunnels become the shortest line
between two points.
Towns
are mere delays.
Cities announce
themselves and vanish in your rear-
view mirror.
You're closing in
on what you call your destination.
More definite because it's nearer
now, it loses most of its attraction.
It turns into a problem you will never
solve.

Meanwhile, the road
is where your world and all
reality is happening.
Because
the darts of sleep are numbing you,
you turn the windshield wipers on
and sing along with Pavarotti.
You keep forgetting what you can't
remember.
You're like those people
of an age for whom what's most
important is far back or right now.
Like them you know where you began
and where you are this minute.
But in between those sure
parentheses, you're vague about
a time which for a time meant
everything, then nothing—somewhere
you were and then were not—
a history—a dream—a life.

H.L. HIX

"Necessity Breaks Iron"

—Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*

Scissors cut paper,
Rock makes scissors bend
But is polished by water.
Water is absorbed by sand,
Itself turned to glass by fire.
Fire stops at stone,
Iron makes stone shatter,
Necessity breaks iron.
Nothing stops necessity,
Nothing is left to chance.
Chance dissolves into destiny
Instantly, at one glance.
A glance ends in eternity.
Eternity happens once.

A Story by

WILLIAM VAN WERT

Pas De Deux

Rosa Klinefelter took the train from Lexington to Concord for Thanksgiving. She could have taken a cab from the station, but she was tired of sitting. The rest of her body was seventy-three, but her legs were still forty-five, so she walked. She was used to walking. Sometimes, she walked a mile or two in a day. She had gotten herself a dog, a big labrador retriever, just to give herself an excuse to be out on the sidewalks. She didn't like the dog inside the house very much, but it did get her outside, morning and night, for quick sprints at bushes and barking at cars.

She didn't get to Concord that often, and she wanted to walk, to feel the accumulation of houses, block after block: old row homes and colonials, with front yards that sloped to the street, the houses like sentinels, all on alert. She liked to look at wine-colored bricks, that special look they have after heavy rain and just before snow. She took heart to know they all had chimneys, high wooden ceilings and fireplaces in late fall and winter. Many of the streets were slued and crooked with cobblestones. Bad enough for cars, much less for crossing. But the sidewalks were wide and sure, so she hurried herself across the streets and slowed to savor the blocks, themselves.

Truth be told, she didn't like New England that much. Each year the winters seemed worse to her, the heavy snows more personally aimed at her. She was sure she would die one day in a snowbank, created by the plows of Public Utilities, a little city avalanche that would take her in March and then expose her again in May, and, of course, she would look abominable. She had been happy living in St. Louis, when Leo was still alive and working as an insurance man. She had moved with him on his job relocations, first to Hartford, then to Lexington, but she had become a little less happy each time. Now Leo was dead, and she stayed on in New England, out of inertia, old memories and a love of fall colors.

She was going to the home of Ruthie Biskind for Thanksgiving. Last year, Ruthie had come to her house. This was her year to go to Ruthie. Once upon a time, they had both been insurance men's wives in Hartford and both with husbands named Leo, but they hadn't known each other well enough then to spend Thanksgiving. The ritual had sprouted, almost ten years old now, from their mutual widowhood and a pensioner's reunion they both attended.

As far as Rosa was concerned, they still weren't friends. Ruthie Biskind was her social work, her case load of one, that charity rarity that she gave to once a year, like Cancer Research or the March of Dimes or Jerry's Kids. She had her faith intact, but Ruthie Biskind was her one allowance to good works, from which she hoped to secure her salvation in the hereafter. God would look kindly on these Thanksgivings and spare her some of the sins of her youth.

She was supposed to be there by now, but she wanted to stop at the Pantry Pride, which she knew would be open until three, because she had called ahead the day before. The store was almost empty, and yet it felt full enough to her, because of all the criss-crossed overhangings in every aisle of plastic pumpkins and cut-outs of turkeys with their heads still on and Mayflower men in hornblower hats.

She walked straight to the Deli Section and stopped to sniff. She liked the smell of fresh bread and pastries well enough, but she was really hoping to catch the smells of cooked turkey. Instead, they had a barbecued chicken slowly burning on the rotisserie, behind the glass with all the orange lights. The glass was fogged from the heat, and the food looked Chinese.

"Looks old," she said, talking to herself.

"No, mam," a young man said from behind the counter. "We cook them fresh daily. That's a Frank Perdue oven-stuffer roaster."

"Why isn't it in the oven, then?"

"I don't know, mam. I guess they want you to see how plump it gets when it's cooking."

"Why does it look so orange? Is that from the lights?"

"Yes. And maybe also from our special herbs and spices."

"What herbs and spices?"

"I don't know. Paprika, for one."

"Oh... paprika for one."

"Yes, and besides, Perdue oven-stuffer roasters are yellower than other brands. Can I give you some?"

"Give me?"

"Well, sell you one?"

"I was hoping you'd have a turkey. I like the smell of turkey cooking."

"You know what? I thought that would be a cool idea too. I guess the supervisor thought a big turkey would take up all the space in the display case and might not turn too well."

"I was hoping for a turkey," she said again, moving over to the fish counter.

"You got any kippered salmon?" she asked the man behind that counter.

"No, mam, we surely don't," he said in a Southern drawl.

She was glad to be outside again and walking. She could see football games on colored televisions through big living room bay windows, the little screen coming out the "big screen" that she liked to think was broadcast for her benefit.

When she passed homes in which she could smell the turkey, she stopped and dusted off her coat, straightened her collar, adjusted her gloves, basking in the family-feeling that smell brought: carved bird with cranberry sauce, homemade stuffing, mashed potatoes and gravy, pumpkin pie, egg nog and ice cream optional.

At one house the smells were exceptionally strong, and she went up on the lawn. If caught, she was prepared to ask directions to Ruthie's house. If not, she was prepared to close her eyes and smile for a long minute or two. But she saw a young boy get up from the sofa and run into the kitchen and she hurried back to the sidewalk with the steps of a sandpiper on a crowded beach.

She assumed there was happiness inside each house, those smells synonymous with families that were still intact. And she did not begrudge any house its full share of hearth and home, because she knew it would not last forever.

Besides, she would have her fill of turkey at Ruthie's house: the smells and the waiting, the constant trips to the kitchen to check, drinking and cards and conversation leading up to setting the table with linen and silver. Actually eating the turkey was the least enjoyable part of the ritual for her.

"Hello, Mrs. Biskind," she said, when Ruthie opened the door for her and let her pass first.

"Hello, Mrs. Klinefelter."

They always started this way: a chilly formality, mix of respect and awkwardness at first, followed by first names after drinks were served.

"You smell like fish, Mrs. Klinefelter."

"Halibut," Rosa said, handing her the wrapped fish. "They didn't have salmon. I took the next nearest thing."

"It don't matter. It's the thought that counts."

"You can take it back if it isn't right," Rosa said, not really sure whether Ruthie could take it back or not. "Smells good in here, but not so much like turkey. What kind did you get?"

"You'll see. No peeking. No going into the kitchen. You want I should get you a drink right away?"

"I want you should," Rosa said, making fun of Ruthie. "Bloody Mary. But no V8. I don't want it should be V8."

"It's what I've got, Mrs. Klinefelter," Ruthie said.

"You got any Campbell's tomato soup? Use that instead, Mrs. Biskind."

"It's kind. Bis-kind. It rhymes with pinned. I take care to say your name right. You'd think you could do the same with mine."

"How else you going to say my name?" Rosa asked herself. "What you having for yourself?" she called out to the kitchen.

"Gin 'n tonic."

Rosa looked around the room while she waited. Nothing had changed from the last time, except maybe an extra grandchild in the pictures on the piano. Nothing ever changed but the photographs. The furniture was at least as old as her host, and perhaps better preserved at that. What she smelled had lemon in it. Ruthie must have polished the table and chairs for the occasion.

"So," Ruthie said, handing her the tepid Bloody Mary, "we have lots to talk about."

"Let's play cards."

"Right away? We might think about pacing ourselves. We have some time before the food is ready."

"I want to play cards."

"Okay, then. Let's see. I wonder where I put them."

Rosa resented having to go through with this charade of spontaneity each time. She knew that Ruthie played solitaire every single day. She also resented having to use the same deck of cards for close to ten years. The sunflowers on the back looked more like wilted dandelions now. The cards stuck together, bent or broke from the deck when she tried to shuffle them. The faces of the kings, queens and jacks had brown spots on them. The corners on some of the cards were missing.

"Better to cheat with at solitaire," Rosa said to herself.

"How is Ethel?" Ruthie asked from the other room.

"She's my daughter."

"I said, 'How is Ethel,' not 'Who is Ethel?'" Ruthie said, raising her voice and enunciating each syllable. "You've lost your hearing, Rosa."

"I never had it to begin with," Rosa said. "Leo used to call me the queen of denial. For many years I took it as a compliment, because I thought he was saying, 'Queen of the Nile.'"

"I know better," Ruthie said. "You just wouldn't let him insult you if he tried."

Ruthie had found the cards. They went to the dining room table with their drinks.

"You want a coaster?"

"Only if you want me to have one."

"Just this once we'll do without," Ruthie said.

More pretense, Rosa thought, this time to special favors. The table had plenty of rings and cigarette burns and other unidentifiable gouges on it. Rosa seriously doubted that Ruthie owned any coasters.

"So. What shall we play?" Ruthie asked.

"Honeymoon Bridge."

"Oh, that's so fake, with just two people. You have to look at all the hands and pretend you haven't seen. Why don't we just play gin rummy instead?"

"I want the action of making a contract. There's no suspense to gin rummy."

"We could play for money."

"No thank you. You get too surly when you're losing."

"Okay, then. We'll play Honeymoon Bridge, to satisfy you. Are you going to Ethel's for Christmas this year?"

"You know I go every year."

"I wish just once you'd stay put and spend it with me."

"You don't even have a tree. That's no fun."

"So, invite me to your house. You can have the tree."

"I can't change what's been arranged. Four spades."

"How can you make a bid like that? You haven't even looked at the other hand. Besides, you don't leave me any room to say anything."

"I can see three spades in my own hand. The dummy has to have one trick for me. Now say five-something or pass."

"I've got two four-card suits. I wouldn't know which one to pick."

"So pass."

"Okay, then. I pass."

"How are your hips?" Rosa asked as she arranged the dummy hand.

"Hip. You say it in the plural, you make me sound enormous. Like a... hippopotamus, ha ha. It's bad."

"Still looking on you."

"Oh my, yes. Some days, I can't even get out of bed. I can always tell when the weather is changing by my hip. For instance, right now. I can tell you we've got heavy snow coming our way."

"That bad, huh? Lead."

"Okay, then. Let's see. Dummy on the right, lead to the weakest thing in sight."

"The dummy is on your left, Ruthie."

"I know that," Ruthie said in a voice mellowed with gin. "Dummy on the left, lead to the heft."

"How about another drink? I'm on a roll."

"Not before I take my sure tricks," Ruthie said, leading both of her aces, then leading up to her partner's ace. When a trump finesse failed, Rosa's contract was down one.

"Superb defense," Ruthie said, "if I have to say so, myself."

"What defense? You lead out all your aces and then wait."

Rosa could hear Ruthie laughing in the kitchen. Good. Rosa couldn't lose at cards. When she won, she enjoyed the winning. And when she lost, she gave Ruthie pleasure, which was worth salvation points, just like indulgences in the old days. Time off in Purgatory was not a bad trade for going down one at four spades.

"So, how is Ethel?" Ruthie asked again, delivering drinks.

"Fine. She's going to be a grandmother for the first time."

"Oh. That's a fine feeling."

"Yes."

"She's still in Philadelphia?"

"Yes. But my ex-son-in-law died this year."

"Oh, too bad. Her ex-husband?"

"Yes. He had a heart attack."

"So young? I hate that."

Ruthie's husband Leo had died of a heart attack.

"Well, it just happened. He was Jewish. Like you."

"Oh. That's terrible, then. You miss them most when they're gone. You'll miss him?"

"He was a very funny man, in a cruel sort of way. I suppose we'll miss him."

"You and Ethel both?"

"Yes. All of us."

"That will be different, then. He won't be around for Christmas."

"He wasn't around for Christmas last year. Or the year before. He was her ex-husband."

"Still. Once a husband, always a husband, you know what I mean?"

"How's the turkey coming?"

"Coming fine. Do you still miss your Leo?"

"Sometimes, yes. But you get used to doing things your own way. Not having them around."

"I never have," Ruthie said, hurrying a drink to her lips. "You never made much money in insurance? Seems to me I remember that."

"It was a job," Rosa said. "Leo did his job. He had a good policy. Left me in good shape."

"But he always wanted to be a ballplayer or something. Wasn't that it?"

"An umpire, Ruthie. He umpired. It was his second job, but it took up all his passion."

"And was he very good at it?"

"Quite good. He used to wake the neighbors on game days, practicing in the mornings. He would stand in the bathroom and look into the mirror. 'Baahh fo-ah. Take your base.' he'd scream. Or 'Stee-rike three-ah. You're outta here.'"

"But he was always in Little League?"

"Minor leagues. Pawtucket, Hempstead, Fairfield, Waltham. He moved around. He always dreamed of umpiring in the majors."

"And never made it?"

"One game, he did. He got the Red Sox too. It was in '62 or was it '68? Anyway, they had a strike. The major league umpires went out. Leo got to call one game. He struck out Ted Williams three times. The Splendid Splinter, they called him."

"I bet he didn't take too kindly to that."

"He said Leo had his finger up his... well, you know where. But it was Leo's greatest thrill."

"My Lev, his greatest thrill was me. He always told me that."

"Oh, big enough deal. Husbands always say that to their wives."

"No, but my Leo? He meant them."

"If it makes you happy, Ruthie... if it keeps you sane. And how about your Bubba? Is he still coaching soccer?"

"Lacrosse. It's different. Bubba says it's more violent."

"Why'd you ever call him Bubba? I never asked you that."

"He was Leo Junior. We didn't want to call him Junior. So we got to Bubba somehow. He's got a brand-new boy, Bubba. He couldn't name him Leo, of course, but he wanted to. For my sake. So, he called him Lee."

"Maybe he can pick up the O later on. Here, I've finished my drink already and we haven't played another hand."

"I'll get you another. I'm not much into the cards today."

"Because you didn't get the bid?"

"No. Because my fingers hurt."

She went off into the kitchen, leaving Rosa to her shame.

"Be nice," Rosa coached herself. It was rude of her not to be more considerate of Ruthie's arthritis, wherever it happened to strike. She resolved to do better. The very next hand. She would let Ruthie get the bid. Very cheap.

And so it happened. Ruthie bid one no-trump. She had the points for it. But her dummy had just three points in it and two singletons. Rosa couldn't help herself. She ran all the clubs and hearts before she let Ruthie get the lead. Down four.

"It's a good thing we aren't keeping score," Ruthie said, just when Rosa was about to ask for a pencil and paper.

Rosa drank half her drink at once, as consolation.

"I want to ask you something, Rosa."

"Ask."

"Have you ever thought about being with a man again?"

"Such thoughts do happen. I still don't understand your question."

"I don't mean just being with. I mean... well, really being with. Like, sexually."

"How old are you, Ruthie? Sixty-eight?"

"Soon to be sixty-nine?"

"And you still want it?"

"I don't know about that. But if you're with a man who wants it...?"

"Have you got someone in mind?"

"Oh no," Ruthie blushed. "But Bubba, he bought a condo in Florida. He says there are lots of retired people there. He thinks I should consider moving

down there. I could live there for free, and he would come down with the family on vacations."

"What do you think?"

"I feel guilty, just thinking about it. Poor Leo. I wouldn't want any dishonor should fall on him."

"Forget about Leo. He's beyond dishonor. What about you?"

"I wouldn't know what to do if a man put his hands on me."

"You'd have to hope and pray he knew what to do."

"It's not as funny as you think."

"I'm sorry, dear. I wouldn't know what to do either. I guess I have consigned such things to days gone by. Like ice skating or swimming at the Cape or mixed-doubles bowling."

"Would you come down to see me if I moved?"

"Sure," Rosa said, not really very sure inside.

Her salvation was talking about moving. It was a bit much. She was feeling very tipsy suddenly.

"I expect the food is ready now," Ruthie said, breaking their silence. "If you would set the table..."

"Of course."

The trimmings came first. Rosa took pleasure in seeing each one appear. Mashed potatoes. Gravy. Cranberry sauce. Applesauce. Lima beans. Corn. Pumpkin pie.

"I'll get the meat and then we're set," Ruthie said.

Rosa sat down and waited. What Ruthie brought to the table was a ham, not a turkey.

"This is ham," Rosa said.

"Yes," Ruthie smiled. "A very lovely Virginia ham."

"It isn't turkey."

"They had a sale on ham."

"You people aren't even supposed to eat ham."

"Exactly. I make this sacrifice for my Christian friend."

"Catholic."

"If you're not Jewish, you're Christian. It's all the same mistake to me. Besides, with a name like Klinefelter you should be more tolerant."

"I want to say the blessing."

"It's my house. I thought I would do that."

"We both pray to ourselves, then. I'm going to make the sign of the cross over this... ham."

"You could have turkey anytime. A little variety, for a change."

Rosa could feel her spirituality being tested. The squeeze was on. She didn't even like ham. She would go through her parish priest the next time. The object of her charity should at least share the same faith.

They ate. Pass this or that. Please and thank you. Otherwise, silence.

"Rosa," Ruthie said, serving the pie, "I want to tell you how much your friendship means to me. You're as dear to me as... well, as Leo was when he was alive."

Rosa wanted to scream. She wanted to call Ruthie a stinking stingy uptown assface. She could deal with insults, snide remarks, ironies, even complete

silences. But she couldn't cope with this presumption of intimacy between them. This cold-hearted compliment.

"I spit on your ham," she muttered.

"What's that?"

"I sit on your hand, I said."

"I don't understand that expression."

"It's an old St. Louis saying. It means I'm humbled. Thank you."

"I've embarrassed you, Rosa. You're red in the face. I'm sorry. I get so sentimental when I drink."

She started to get up, to clear the dishes. But her hip locked and she fell, hitting the chair first and then the carpet.

"Ruthie, are you all right?"

Rosa was shocked. Shocked and guilty. Her pride had caused this fall, she was sure of it. Purgatory loomed large on the horizon.

"I can't get up," Ruthie said.

Rosa tried to lift her, but couldn't.

"Well, you're too much for me, girl."

"What'll we do?"

"Stay there. I'll think of something."

Rosa went into the kitchen and made herself another Bloody Mary. Sat down. Sipped. Thought vaguely about Ruthie on the floor, looked out the window to the back porch of the adjacent house. They were putting a turkey carcass in the garbage. Rosa had half a hunch to go over there and get that carcass.

"I must be drunk," she said to herself.

She finished her drink and went back to Ruthie.

"I have to go potty, Rosa," Ruthie whined. "Really bad."

"I'll call 9-1-1. They'll know what to do."

The ambulance came within the hour and took Ruthie out on a stretcher. At the hospital Rosa let the nurses look after Ruthie. She was distracted by the smells, not just of ammonia and medication, but of something else. All those people in their hospital beds, those with broken hips and shingles, those with cancer and herniated discs, all those people were eating turkey. The smells besieged her. Siege: attack by waiting. She fainted.

Rosa went to Philadelphia for Christmas. Ethel met her at the airport in the rental car and took her home. Everything was as she hoped it would be: the guest bedroom, with the quilt she had given Ethel that her mother had made for her; a Christmas tree, with lots of presents underneath; family photos, including the new grandson, her great-grandson; and a turkey roasting very slowly in the big Dutch oven.

"I'm sorry about Ruthie," Ethel said.

"She had a good life," Rosa said. "They say that once the hips go, the rest goes pretty fast. Especially in women."

Even as she said this, she was aware that they all outlived their men, these women, and her daughter's daughter would probably be no different.

"I'm going to tell you a secret, though."

"Yes?"

"I converted her to Catholicism before she died."

"When? How?"

"She was lying on the carpet, and all she could think about was needing to pee. I baptized her right there and then, and she didn't even know I'd done it."

"I don't know if that counts, then."

"It counts."

"Yes, mother. Whatever you say."

"I'm thinking about moving to Florida."

"You're full of secrets this year, mother. Let's go in the other room. This kitchen is too hot."

"You go, dear. I want to sit a spell."

Left alone in the kitchen, Rosa sipped her drink, smelled the room and smiled. She felt like she was home again. The flames were very far away. Like little rake-teeth in a vast prairie. Saved, at last.

OOOO

PAUL RAMSEY

The Clock on the Beach

The clock on the beach was discarded from boat or ship and washed ashore
Or washed off the beach into the outgoing tide and back again.
The clock no longer keeps time except its own,
And the time of its washing back and forth in the surf-fall,
The time of the summer and of the moon and of the sea,
And in the slow harvesting of the tide and the tide's returns
Now or in time to be.

DABNEY STUART

Coming To

1.

Language doesn't inhere
in anything. A label
fits on the outside, and can be
peeled off. Why else

do we say *linden*,
or *childhood*, keep our throats
primed for the next word?

A slip of the tongue can
get a man a bride, six
children, an ulcer, a life
he ends up talking to

at night when he can't hear
himself. He dreams
his words bead on his life

like water on waxed chrome,
slide off when he moves.

2.

A boy sits on a stone bench
at the unspeakable edge
of two bowed lindens. His life
will inscribe an arc, fifty
years tending, until

— enovalled by a stand of trees
painted in what was ice, once,
on the bottom of the world —

he feels
the needle's point the globe spins on
touch him, and balance him,
and turn him back.

3.

He holds the secrets he has
kept from himself before
him like a microphone
with mystery at the other end,
receiving. He talks
into them, hearing
his voice recede, winding
into a dark where dark breaks.

When he listens
to his words play
back, they shimmer oddly, on
edge — a stranger talking —
as if they have gone
through something he has
no other knowledge of
and brought it back:

his life.

THE RICHARD E. LAUTZ POETRY AWARD

An award of $250.00 given in memory of Richard Lautz, former poetry editor of Four Quarters, for the best poem published in Four Quarters in 1991-92 is awarded to

Losing the Farm
by Barbara Daniels

Honorable Mention

L.D. Brodsky, for "Lipizzaner Fantasies of an SS Officer"
Barbara Crooker, for "Writers' Colony"
David Ignatow, for "In Passing"
David Sumner, for "Aspects of Death"
Nancy G. Westerfield, for "Comparative Anatomy"

Our congratulations to Ms. Daniels and all those honored, and our thanks to our distinguished panel of poet judges:

Lucille Clifton
William Heyen
J.D. McClatchy

All three poets were touched by Richard's commitment to poetry at some time in their lives.

BARBARA DANIELS

Losing the Farm

What we had is gone, the stone porch, bright fall
loading trees with light, the sheep that blundered
through the open door. Beyond the thin wall
the old woman thumped her stick and made me wonder

how much longer she could struggle with the stairs.
In her half of the house the hall clock struck
and struck again. Outside, the sway-backed mare
bent to the grass beside a pock-marked truck.

We were all waiting. Men were cutting trees
in the old orchard, dreams that had bloomed,
bouquets of butterflies. Briskly, you shelled peas
and dropped them in a metal bowl. The doomed

farm rode in the sun of its last season.
I swam, alone, up and back, through the blue
water, watching the light, asking the reason
now can never stand against the new.

Angled bones of houses crowded on our hill.
Inside our house your flowers blazed, alive,
crimson and white on every windowsill.
You would not keep the ones that did not thrive.

An Essay by

JOSEPH MEREDITH

The Throw

In one of my favorite stories, Richard Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost A Man," a smallish seventeen year old named Dave accidentally shoots and kills another man's mule while playing with an old pistol. The townspeople find out and Dave becomes the butt of a good laugh. In the end, he hops a freight out of town, going, as Wright says, "...somewhere where he could be a man...." Every time I teach that story I tell my students there is no way for Dave, at least in his own mind, to stay in that town. I tell them that no matter how old he gets, no matter how much respect he earns, he will never live it down. There will always be somebody who remembers how Old Dave once shot a mule, and wasn't that the funniest thing.

Most of us don't have such public failures to live down. Mostly we keep our failures to ourselves and a few select witnesses for added sting. But no matter how long we live, no matter how much respect we gain, some embarrassments keep coming back to haunt us. They lurk just at the fringes of memory to humble us in our pride. For a kid who always prided himself in his fielding, hardly anything could have been worse than "the throw."

In the summer of 1965 I was a one-hundred thirty pound utility man for the intermediate team at Summerdale Boys Club in northeast Philadelphia. I was seventeen years old. My baseball hero had been Cookie Rojas, who filled in mostly at second and short for Gene Mauch's woeful Phillies teams of the early 60's. At seventeen I was getting a bit old for sports heroes, but Rojas was so versatile in those days that you had to admire the guy. In one game Mauch used him in every position but pitcher, partly to liven up another dreadful game in another endless August, but partly too, I like to think, to showcase one of the game's unique talents. Rojas could field and throw as well as anybody. He could get you the clutch base hit when you needed it. He could even steal a base or two, more from guile than speed. He was one of the few players not tainted by the Phillies' gaseous collapse of '64. Everybody I knew liked Cookie Rojas. How could you not and pretend to love baseball?

Anyway, I did both—liked Cookie Rojas and loved baseball, I mean. If you could always get your bat on the ball and run without falling, if you could throw reasonably straight and field your position like a demon—all of which I could do—you had to feel something special toward Rojas. Especially if you weighed only slightly more than a good-sized Great Dane, and no matter how many times you got your bat on the ball it never went very far. I think I led the Northeast Suburban League that year in tappers back to the mound and squibs down the line, the kind where the first baseman all but sneers at you as he bends to pick up the ball, gently meandering without the least bit of urgency in its course, just before it hits the bag. Now, if I'd had Richie Ashburn speed, I might have beat out some of those for hits. But I had Rojas speed,

which meant the only thing moving more slowly down the line than the ball was me. And so it was not uncommon for the first baseman to have made the put out and have already whipped the ball around the horn before I crossed the bag, leaning precipitously forward, both arms trailing behind like Frank Budd reaching for the tape, as though there were still a chance I might actually overturn the ump's call, because if you hustled, you always legged everything out, even in the face of the irrefutable fact that an out is an out is an out. And if you were a 130 pound utility man, you damned well better hustle. This unwarranted perseverance has been a strength or a weakness of mine, depending on your perspective, ever since.

But I'm getting off the track. This isn't about Cookie Rojas or hero worship. It's about discovering how, just when the world looks brightest and most perfect, things can go haywire for unexplainable reasons. It's about a time in my life when things were going pretty good and looked like they could only get better; when, for a kid who learned to catch a baseball covered with black friction tape on the concrete driveway behind a city rowhouse, standing on that ragged grass between the neat twins of Miriam Road and the freight yard of a major trucking concern, under a bright blue sky with a glove on and a cap pulled down low on my brow was as close as I got with any regularity to the natural world until I went south to graduate school years later. And in July the sky was as blue and satiny as the mantle of the blonde May Queen I had the wicked crush on, and I filled with a fervor for the game that had a great deal to do with love and maybe a little to do with pride, although I couldn't have named it at the time. It's about playing four positions in one afternoon against a team visiting from Catasauqua in coal country and getting three base hits in four at bats and about uncorking the most perfect change up I had ever thrown just about knee high on the outside part of the plate, which would have been barely noteworthy in my personal athletic chronicle had it not been for the fact that I wasn't pitching at the time but playing second base. I have referred to it ever since as "the throw." And it turned an afternoon of minor triumph into one of failure and embarrassment, joy into disappointment, hope to a kind of craven despair. I didn't know at the time that this would constitute a pretty fair paradigm of adult life, nor that this would be my last game of organized ball for more than eighteen years. Even then it was softball and not at all the same. I also didn't know that, as seasons went, I'd had a pretty fair season. All I knew was what I saw and couldn't for the life of me explain: the ball I'd thrown with all my might foofing harmlessly out of my hand and floating as though in slow motion toward our catcher, while the runner I thought I had dead at the plate crossed standing with all the time in the world for what turned out to be the winning run. Our catcher, Mike Daley, stood there with veins standing out on his neck and screamed, "Why didn't you throw it hard?" And I couldn't answer him.

But that was at the end of a long season that had begun in the numbing drizzle of a windswept Philadelphia March. On the first day of tryouts the sky was the color of a dead thing you might find under your refrigerator, something that maybe used to be a mouse, but now was just a flat grey pelt with what looked like a piece of leather shoelace attached. That color. And with whiter wisps of cloud racing toward the traffic on the Roosevelt Boulevard a block

removed just at the height of the highest fly balls, clouds that seemed to wave and flap like pennants at Connie Mack Stadium.

The wind was so damp it didn't matter how warmly you dressed. Without a windbreaker, and no one I knew owned a windbreaker, it went right through your sweatshirt to bare skin in about thirty seconds, chilling you so fast and so completely you might as well have been standing out in the sodden outfield bare chested. After about twenty minutes, nothing worked the way it was supposed to. My hands were so cold I couldn't feel my finger tips. And my feet were wet and shriveling through my Chuck Taylor All-Stars. I had outgrown my spikes and our local PAL team from the year before and there was no sense inviting in a new pair of shoes until I knew whether I'd made the new team. It's a marvel how I ever caught anything under those conditions. Maybe I was tougher than I'm giving myself credit for. Maybe I was a better athlete than I remember from so many years back. Nah! I ran down a couple of flies more out of fear than toughness. Who's not going to try their hardest among so many strangers who looked like real ballplayers? My best friend, Joe Blee, and I had walked the better part of two miles across the Boulevard into a neighborhood we barely knew except from the reports of a few schoolmates. That day, Joe was the only one there who knew I could play ball. And he was off somewhere with the pitchers. Everybody else was foreign to me and I to them. Going all out was partly a matter of pride, but mostly a way of avoiding embarrassment. Our coach, a tubby little man with a florid face, was a fireman in his other life away from baseball. His name has gone into the cracks of my memory like a coin between loose floorboards: you know it's in there, can see the edge of it standing straight up glinting in the light, but you just can't get it out. Any way, I guess he saw enough that first afternoon to ask me back. The next practice, I took grounders with the infield. The assistant coach, who was also the catcher's father, hit me five waist high, two-hoppers. It was like picking apples off a table. So I made the team.

Our season ran from early April until school let out in mid-June. From then to the Fourth of July was play-offs. Everybody started disappearing for vacations around the Fourth of July, the coaches included, so the logic of the schedule was iron-clad. Nobody wanted to lose a playoff game because their star pitcher had been packed off to hawk papers on the beaches of Sea Isle City or Wildwood.

I started out at second base and fielded pretty well but didn't hit a lick. Every opponent's biggest kid, it seemed, ended up on the mound facing me. We're talking some big seventeen year olds, kids who could throw consistently in the high seventies, while I was discovering that I could still hit consistently only in the high fifties, or just about as fast as our hypertensive coach pitched batting practice. For three weeks in practice, I hit like Rojas, spraying balls all over the outfield. Then the season started for real, and I settled into my routine of, well, squibs and dribblers and an occasional pop-up off the fists. My hands were so cold most games in April that a fastball off the fists was worse than catching the hardwood ruler of Sister Marie of the Single Eyebrow across your palms. You were immediately convinced you had grabbed hold of a high voltage power line and would never be able to use your hands again.

It was the season I learned that most painful truth of athletes: the competition had passed me by, something that most of the great ones don't learn till middle age sets in. So I considered myself fortunate, in an unfortunate kind of way, to have had that piece of bitter wisdom thrust upon me early enough that I got on with the business of my life after the season, got a job for the rest of the summer delivering orders on a bike for a German grocer. I made enough to buy my own school clothes for the first time in my life. My mother was proud and I was resigned to the second hand thrill of the spectator.

For two weeks in May, I was shifted to short while Jimmy McGrath had his tonsils out. I even spent a few games at third when Bobby Bartle broke his wrist in what otherwise was the prettiest head-first slide I'd ever seen by someone my age. But at third I was scared spitless most of the time. Spring run-off had eroded a gully six inches wide and about four inches deep that ran diagonally across the diamond from the high ground at first to the sewer drain just foul of third. No matter how many times the fathers filled it in, the next rain would wash it all away. I spent seven fearful games trying to avoid being emasculated while still chattering manfully from the aptly named "hot corner." Something else I learned about being grown up from that season: no matter how scared you are, if you keep chattering manfully, most will think you're on top of the situation and pay you accordingly, either in money or respect or just distance. It is only rarely when someone will probe your eye with a look that asks if you are full of it without ever saying a word that you know you've run into a former third base replacement. Then you've either made a fast friend or a hard enemy. But that, too, is another story.

Let me get back to the game against Catasauqua and "the throw." We were in contention for the playoffs until Bobby Bartle went out with his broken wrist. He was a kid who could hit a ball extraordinary distances and frequently did. Though he probably outweighed me by less than thirty pounds, he might have lived in a different universe. Those thirty pounds moved him across the line from boyhood to manhood. He shaved every day. He had a swing that was quick without being hurried, and when he made good contact, which was often, the ball leaped off his bat like a golf ball. In those days I had never heard the term "bat speed," but Bobby must have generated a lot of it with his compact, effortless swing. Well, without him in the lineup we were not the same team. We lost three games in a row to teams we had already beaten and missed the playoffs by a game. When the kids from coal country arrived a week later, we were disappointed and looking for a way to recapture some pride.

The organization at Summerdale had a reciprocal arrangement with the folks from Catasauqua, which is on the Lehigh River just north of Allentown. One year they would bus it down the Northeast Extension of the turnpike to play our teams, the next year Summerdale would make the trek up to the southern edge of the played out anthracite fields of northeastern Pennsylvania to play them.

In 1965 it was Summerdale's turn to host. These were intended to be friendly exhibition games, pure and simple. They brought four teams—midgets, juniors, intermediates, and seniors—and made a day of it. There were charcoal grills all over the place and coolers filled with soda and beer. There was also

a good deal of back-slapping and adult laughter. Friendships were renewed and new ones started.

When the Catasauquans got off their bus, I expected to see a whole team of man-sized boys, grey-jawed men pretending to be sixteen and seventeen. Even though it was barely sixty miles from their field to ours, we'd been hearing stories about the big "coal crackers from up state" all season. It was the first time I'd ever heard the term. It didn't seem to have any trace of bigotry about it, just a statement of respect for the strength and size of the players. "Raw-boned" was another term the coaches used to refer to players on past Catasauqua teams. In my mind "raw-boned" conjured images of John Havlicek, or worse, Ted Kluzewski—the kind of guy whose lungs don't fit on one x-ray picture. I had blown them up in my mind beyond all human proportion, but when I saw them I got my first lesson in the power of a run away imagination.

They were no bigger nor more fearsome than most of my teammates. More than a few were even scrawnier than I was. They were no better nourished, it seemed, nor stronger, nor faster of foot. In some cases, they even looked a little grey around the eyes, as though they needed food or sleep. After the initial shock, I started to look forward to the game. Maybe these guys wouldn't be so tough after all.

It was Johnny Lavelle's turn to start at second base. Although he was not quite the glove man I was, he occasionally hit a ball over the shortstop's head, and, at our city field without fences, every one of those was a potentially big hit, since the ball could roll a great distance if the outfielder failed to cut it off. I started in left. With two outs in the first inning and a runner on first, their batter hit a screamer that landed about ten feet in front of me and bounced right into my glove. I didn't have to move. The runner hesitated a split second, and the ball got out to me so fast that it didn't take much of a throw to force him at second. It was the only time in my life I ever did that.

My first at bat I hit a ball over the shortstop's head but was stranded on second. In the second inning I moved to center for two innings without an opportunity. In the third, I played short and was nearly crushed by the kid who finally replaced Bobby Bartle at third. His name was Frank Agovino. He couldn't field worth a damn to my way of thinking, but he had real pectoral muscles and an arm like a cannon. All he had to do was let the ball bounce off him, pick it up, and fire to first. Not a bad way to play the position when it comes down to it. But in those days, and in spite of my unspoken fear, I was insulted at having been replaced by a guy who could rarely get his glove on the ball. Frank was told to take anything he could get going to his left. I charged a high chopper and Frank took me, left me sitting in the red dust while he gunned the guy out.

I got another hit my next at bat, a hard roller past the mound that changed direction radically just as their charging second baseman was about to glove it. Bad hop? Too bad. Hit the gully? Tough one, kid.

The rest of the game disappeared into my mind's floorboards like the name of the coach. All I know for sure is that we had a lead going into the top of the seventh and last inning when Catasauqua rallied. I was playing second by then. If Johnny Lavelle was still in the game somewhere, I can't tell. But I was

in because I was a defensive specialist, and by that time, even the coaches wanted to win. That's when it happened.

The score was tied. With runners on first and third and two out, our pitcher—could it have been Joe Blee?—inexplicably abandoned the stretch and went into a full windup. The runner on first, who probably couldn't believe his good fortune, broke for second and the batter took a strike. Mike Daley let fly, with both the runner and me headed for the bag. That's when the kid on third bolted for home, the second half of a delayed double steal. I knew what they were doing. It's what I would have done in the same situation: forcing us to make the play. Maybe you don't do it with Ryne Sandberg covering the bag, or even Cookie Rojas. But with a seventeen year old, most of whom are jittery as colts anyway, the odds are not as bad as they might seem.

I was not, however, your typical jittery seventeen year old. I was so happy I could have cheered at the sight. I knew I had the guy dead. I took the throw six feet in front of second, with all my momentum heading toward the plate. There was no way that kid could score unless I tripped and fell flat on my face. Or the catcher dropped the ball. I threw so hard I could feel the blood burn the skin on the back of my hand. What happened then I have never been able to account for.

The ball went straight enough, right for the catcher's mitt, but it floated so slowly, like watching a leaf fall, I thought I was dreaming. It may have been the first time in my life I experienced that schizoid feeling of acting and observing at the same time. I was possessed simultaneously by two strong emotions: horror and curiosity. On the one hand, I had the distinct feeling I had just been victimized by forces more powerful and anonymous than anything I had ever guessed: a window opening on the adult world for just an instant, like glimpsing something frightening through the window of a train that has sped by going sixty. Yet on the other hand, the observer in me was fascinated by the seemingly incongruent physical phenomena I was watching. Velocity is directly proportional to force. Throw hard, the ball goes fast. I had thrown as hard as I knew how and here was the ball taking its good old time, as though it were suddenly under water, the air aqueous and dense.

The runner crossed standing. He was a good three feet past Mike Daley before the ball arrived, the most perfect change up I have ever thrown. Daley couldn't believe it. He stood angry and incredulous with his wrists resting on his hips, screaming at me while the kids from Catasauqua whooped it up on their side of the cage. My mouth must have been hanging open. There was nothing I could say.

We didn't score in our half of the inning and were forced to shake hands with the other team before we got to the hotdogs and soda. For me it was a gesture filled with hypocrisy and anger and shame.

No one has ever been able to explain what happened to my entire satisfaction. The worst explanation, from the psychologists among my friends, says I didn't throw as hard as I thought I did. Sure! Who better than I is going to know how hard I threw? The best says that probably one of two things happened: either, one, in taking the ball quickly out of my glove, I didn't get a grip on any seams and the ball slipped out of my hand without any rotation, kind of like a knuckleball; or, two, instead of grasping the ball with my fingers and thumb as usual, I had the ball deep in my palm and the result is like

another kind of trick pitch, the palm ball, a pitch that fools the batter with lots of arm speed but none of the added sling normally supplied by the snapping wrist. Of the two, I like the second better. If I had had any inkling twenty-five years ago of what I did or how to do it again, I might have tried pitching for a couple of years.

I know what you're thinking. *Tempest in a teacup. What's the big deal? Get a life, buddy. There are more important things to worry about.* Well, of course there are. And I most certainly do. I have two kids teetering on the brink of uncertain adulthood. I have seen the marriages of friends break apart. I have watched both of my parents wither and die. I can't explain why "the throw" keeps haunting me. Maybe it has something to do with the exasperating inexplicability of it all. It is more likely though that, since it happened in the last real game of baseball that I ever played, I never got a chance to make up for it. In my mind, the last thing I ever did on a baseball field made me look foolish and weak, and there is no way to go back and change it. So it is there—not large but nonetheless real, humiliating, and occasionally sore.

Faulkner characterized the memory of old people as "...a huge meadow no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottle neck of the most recent decade." I know what he means. Standing out in my mind's fair field, out there where Miriam Road makes its graceful curve toward the Boulevard, standing as though under shady trees scented with magnolia, along with the thrilling whisper of my name from a woman's parted lips and the smiles of loving children, away off there in the low, damp part down by the stream, "the throw" plays itself out endlessly, like a loop of video tape, and, though I exert Herculean effort, the ball always disobeys, that kid always scores, and I am always left embarrassed and confused, wondering what happened. Sounds like life to me.

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A Story by

GREGOR HARTMANN

Friction

In summer Godzilla hated to ride the Japanese commuter trains. Too much hot moist breathing. All those bodies pressed against him, chests expanding and contracting, squeezing him in a wet iron lung.

To distract himself from the crush, Godzilla sometimes played a game on the trains. He'd let go of his briefcase and see if it fell or stayed near his hand, suspended in flesh. Today he couldn't play games. Not with tiny Mr. Toda at his side, stern and silent.

They made a strange couple. Small delicate Toda, in his perfect suit, his hair oiled and neatly combed, like a child whose mother had prepared him for church. Big sweating rumpled Godzilla—tall enough to look out over the sea of black hair, tall enough to bump his head on doorways. But he had to hold in his anger. His long arm twitched, remembering.

Perhaps this was his punishment: Toda was going to make him ride the trains, bodies pumping heat into his, until he melted into a puddle of blonde monster butter.

Slowly the train rose out of Osaka, muttering up the western hills. At Takarazuka they wiggled out of the jammed car to transfer to a local. Relief! While they waited on the platform they stood behind a man in a blue business suit as he practiced his golf swing. Before and after each stroke he posed, arms raised, head down, absorbed in the moment.

"Modern samurai," Godzilla joked.

Mr. Toda didn't laugh, and Godzilla shriveled inside his vast clumsy bulk.

Godzilla's real name was Christopher Randall. He taught Een-guu-reesh in a tiny conference room filled with architectural memorabilia. Contour maps, their elevations swirling like fine-grained woods. Posters announcing design competitions in Tokyo, New York, Florence. A 300:1 model of a municipal gymnasium, so precise, so perfect, that when he put his eye to a tiny window he expected to see tiny figures in kendo armor whacking each other with matchstick swords.

For students he had 10 men, 1 woman, ages 23 to 41, Een-guu-reesh fair to poor. Chris had 12 weeks to prepare the architects for an international conference on seismic engineering. It was the company's first contract with his school, so he was under considerable pressure to shine.

On the first day of class, his boss's admonitions ringing in his ears, the sense of invisible rules was so powerful that Chris sat stiffly, almost afraid to move. Teaching by Japanese techniques was nothing like he's experienced in the States. When he asked questions they had to be directed to the class at large, not an individual, so failure to answer wouldn't embarrass anyone. He did more drilling than he would have in an American classroom since Japanese students loved to chant sentences in unison. At first their blank

passivity was frustrating, but after two weeks they got used to him and loosened up. Most of the architects were older than Chris and some wielded considerable power in the firm, but he was sensei—teacher—so they treated him with respect and deference.

All but one. Hosoi was 27, the same age as Chris. He was a stout man with a round face and plump cheeks and longish hair that plopped over his forehead and almost eclipsed his heavy black glasses. In class he usually sat quietly, slumped in his seat, body motionless except for his tight hand, which restlessly thumbed the pages of a Japanese-English dictionary like a gambler warming up a deck of cards.

Hosoi could sit for hours, a dreamy turtle, while the class flowed on around him. He didn't come out of his shell until Chris announced the period for "free conversation." Then his shoulder twitched and he brushed the hair out of his eyes and leaned forward and raised his arm, elbow propped on the table. "Mr. Randall. May I ask?"

And then the provocative questions.

"Why so many criminal in America?"

"What is crack baby?"

"TV say family live in car..."

Chris didn't want to be a cultural imperialist, so he tried to react like a Japanese. He suppressed his embarrassment and anger and pretended not to feel the barbs. Crack baby? Good question, Mr. Hosoi. You wont' find "crack" in your dictionaries because it's a new slang term for... Professional, serene, he incorporated the jabs into his lessons. Jujitsu: use the attacker's energy against him.

But Hosoi had so much energy.

"American worker—everyone take drugs?"

"No bullet train in America? Really?"

"How come AIDS so much?"

Chris forced himself to be cool, to maintain group harmony. He could have counterattacked by criticizing Hosoi's Een-guu-reesh, by cutting him up so badly he shut up or dropped out, but that would have been unfair. So he soldiered on, politely fielding the questions, trying to play by Japanese rules. The other students ignored Hosoi or treated him like the class clown. Chris tried to imitate their casual manner.

Hosoi brushed the hair out of his face, and his hand rose like a cobra coming our of its basket. Chris tensed.

"Mr Randall. May I ask?"

"Yes, Mr. Hosoi, what is it?"

He unfolded a newspaper clipping with the false modesty of a DA presenting the clinching bit of evidence. "Paper say American change job every four years. Is correct?"

"I don't know the exact figure but we change jobs often, yes."

"Four years only? Then quit?"

"Yes, Mr. Hosoi. We don't have lifetime employment."

Hosoi glanced around the table to make sure the jury got the point. "But." He whispered with Sato, a vocabulary expert. "Is not egotist? Turnover. Hurt company?"

Chris shrugged. "We're free agents. We're not chained to our jobs." Dictionaries rustled as they looked up "chained." Automatically he wrote the word on the board, then composed himself and faced the class. Everyone waited as Hosoi prepared his next thrust. Debating in a foreign language was like two scuba divers fighting underwater, their moves slow and labored, words arising in columns of parallel bubbles.

Hosoi stared at the table as if his lines were written there. "If change often... Not know job... Make defective products. Trade deficit US fault. You think?"

Suave, cosmopolitan Chris posed at the blackboard, mature beyond his years, suppressing his feelings, honoring group harmony, right up to the instant the textbook left his hand and fluttered across the room like a kamikaze temple pigeon. Not at Hosoi—the book smashed into the model of the Fujigaoka Municipal Gymnasium, which shattered with a plastic crackle. Tiny sponge trees exploded in all directions. Some of them bounced across the conference table like tiny green tumbleweeds in a miniature storm.

The class stared at him, no one daring to move or speak. Hosoi froze, a deer pinned by the headlights of a big American car.

Not far from the station was a festival street hung with red and white lanterns and crowded with revellers. Toda led Chris through the crowd, oblivious to the jostling. He took off his coat, and through the wrinkled white shirt Chris could see a dark blotch on his right shoulder, a birthmark shaped like Africa. He looked away, disturbed wondering when this little man was going to break him.

Stalls and concessions lined the street. You could throw rings at sake bottles, or buy tapes, or eat yakitori. The resemblance to the midway at a state fair make him homesick. Each time Chris stepped up to a stall he had to duck under the awning, and people giggled at his height. He forced himself to smile, wishing he truly was Godzilla so he could flatten them like bugs.

Toda bought Chris a snack: a purple and white octopus tentacle roasted on a skewer. Grinning nervously, Chris bit off the tip and chewed, It had the taste and texture of a radial tire. Toda scrutinized his face like a scientist conducting an experiment. Around them families halted to watch the freak eat.

"You like?"

"I like."

"How about Japan food?"

"I like Japan food." Chris grinned moronically and took a big bite and chewed, all 32 teeth meeting in perfect enamel harmony.

After the explosion everyone was afraid to talk, so Chris let them go to lunch early. Usually the best students wanted to eat with him to squeeze in another hour of Een-guu-reesh, but today they hung back. Tail between his legs, Godzilla slunk to his favorite gyudon joint and buried his face in a bowl of rice covered with beef strips. Drinking green tea steamed up his glasses, so he couldn't see the other customers glancing at him, and he could pretend nothing had happened. Nothing at all.

When he returned for the afternoon session Hosoi was missing. "He has to work," Ishikawa volunteered. Chris nodded gravely and continued the lesson. The students were still wary, and he was trembling with aftershocks, so he gave them an essay topic—"My Favorite Building"—and while they scribbled he pretended to read a dictionary.

How do you regain respect after a stupid outburst? He hadn't a clue. But Japanese valued appearances. Maybe he could pretend that nothing had happened, and they would play along, and everything would be OK. The ruined model had disappeared. In its place: a blue vase with a spray of dried grasses.

He had read 5 pages of "H" when someone tapped on the door. Without looking, Chris knew who was being summoned. He gave the architects a homework assignment and let them go. They filed out with nervous bows. Ishikawa started to say something, then changed his mind. When they were gone, Chris squared his shoulders and followed the clerk to the lair of the section chief, fearsome Toda-san.

Chris had met him only once: his first day on the job. He'd prepared a speech about duty and hard work, and was ready to make conversation, but the little man simply gave him the once-over, poker faced, and sent him on to the class. Toda didn't have a private office. His desk was in the corner of a large room filled with draftsmen who labored away in files and rows, their tables aligned as precisely as the squares on a chessboard. Walking along one side of the room, Chris felt like a pawn throwing himself down the throat of a rook.

He saw two options: apologize to Hosoi, or quit before he was fired. An apology, though galling, was quintessentially Japanese. The humbler you acted the more they liked you. The second option would assert American values: freedom, independence, running away from your mistakes.

Toda was on the phone; he motioned to a nearby table. Chris perched on the edge of a chair and eavesdropped. He couldn't understand the words, but the tone and attitude were sharp and harsh. As he spoke Toda's eyes flickered over the American. Talking about him? Not good. Apologize, he decided in a flash. Keep the incident inside the company. If word of his outburst got back to the school they'd fire him, and that would be sayonara to his work visa.

Toda ended the conversation by bowing to the phone. He hung up and stepped over to the table. Chris rose to greet him, and they competed to see who could be more polite. Finally they sat down in unison. Chris licked his lips and considered which language to apologize in. Toda had spent three years on a Bechtel job in Arizona, so he spoke fair Een-guu-reesh, but Japanese was a better language for rolling in the dirt and abasing yourself.

Toda ordered a secretary to fetch tea. He contemplated Chris and blinked.

"Za students. Zey are good?"

"Yes, yes. Fine students. They work very hard."

"Good. You are good teacher."

"Oh no. I'm so inadequate."

"Good teacher! Very good!"

So much politeness was ominous. Chris braced himself. Then Toda threw him a curve. "You know festival at Inariyashiro? Is famous festival."

"No, I haven't heard of it."

"Is tonight. We go. OK?"

"Tonight? A festival?"

"Tonight. Yes."

On the return train, since it was late both men found seats. Toda drove the conversation, politely inquiring about Chris's family, school days, travels, impressions of Japan... Chris was exhausted and ready for the night to end, but he forced himself to play along. One advantage to language problems: it made it easier to stretch the conversation and prevent dead air. Hit a word that was hard to translate—paleolithic, say—and you could kill 10 minutes doing dinosaur impressions.

At no point did the section chief mention the incident which prompted this unprecedented attention. The suspense ate at Chris. Maybe it was too embarrassing even to mention. Maybe Toda was waiting for him to do the honorable thing and resign without being asked.

When they got back to town it was after 11, but despite the hour Toda took him to Dotombori, Osaka's red-light district. Red lights, blue, white, green, purple, gold, orange—neon signs four stories tall, flashing and rippling like magic coral reefs enticing sailors to a sensuous doom. The streets were hopping. Orange-haired whores in hot pants, black-haired whores in kimonos. Four gangsters in grey pinstripe suits guarded a Lincoln Continental. Schools of drunken salarymen drifted along the street, bantering with the barracuda. The noise was terrific: music, shouts, barkers, horns, and from the pinball houses the roar of a million metal bees.

Big Chris was wary of Dotombori and its notorious clip joints, but little Toda strode along the melee cocky as a sailor in a favorite port. Along a canal, over a bridge, three zig-zag alleys, and down into a basement filled with tiny bars, four or five stools to a bar. Half-curtains hanging from the ceiling divided the bars from each other and concealed the drinkers' faces. From the aisle all Chris could see was a hundred headless men. Legs and torsos drinking.

Here it comes, he thought, heart pounding faster. Japanese liked to conduct business in bars because alcohol relaxed the tension. Everyday life in the Misty Isles was a minefield of rules and prohibitions. One misstep could blow your face off. But a man with a few drinks in him could do or say anything without worrying about the consequences. Toda had brought him here to say something difficult or derogatory. Like, we won't be needing your services?

Not that he took a sip and blurted it out. Protocol must be observed, even for this. First came flirting with the mama-san, then bar games, then bragging about the company's new project: an aquarium in Nagoya. Gradually the flow of conversation brought them in sight of that morning's events. Toda spoke in generalities, words smooth as water in a canal, with just a tiny ripple to hint where a body floated under the dark surface.

"Is difficult here for foreigners."

"Sometimes."

"Difficult," Toda clucked. "Japan is hard to understand."

"You can say that again." A bit of apple polishing. Japanese loved to be told how mysterious they were.

Toda nodded. "Za class... Difficult. You muss not surrender."

"Surrender?"

"You muss keep teach. You are fine teacher. Number one."

"No, no," Chris demurred politely.

"Yes! Zey tell me you work very hard."

"Thank you."

"Is true. You are bess. Ozzers quit sooner."

Chris blinked. "Others? You mean I'm not the first teacher?"

Toda nodded mournfully, as if revealing a dark family secret. "Start training 6 monz ago. Two ozzers. Man, woman. Zey quit. Is difficult class."

Chris took a drink to hide his surprise. It made sense, though. No wonder Hosoi's questions were so sharp. It was a routine the bastard had honed on two other foreigners. He shook his head. "I won't quit," he declared. "I like teaching that class. It's a challenge."

Toda beamed and refilled Chris's glass. Chris grabbed the bottle and returned the favor. Another little ritual to maintain harmony. They clinked glasses. Kampai!

Comprehension gradually penetrated his tiredness. If Chris quit it would reflect poorly on the section chief's ability to maintain harmony. Especially if he was the third teacher to bail out. Thus the festival, the personal attention. Red carpet time. He grinned at the older man, who now seemed like a kindly uncle.

"So tell me. How come Hosoi is a bug?"

Toda made a face. "He study in Michigan. Learn foreign ways. Aggressive, ne? Is problem, I know."

"He's not like other Japanese."

"Too long abroad. He forget how to be Japanese."

"He should watch me. I can give him lessons."

They laughed at the thought: an American who acted like a Japanese retraining a Japanese who acted like an American.

"OK, I see why he's a jerk. Now tell me how to handle him."

"Patience."

"No, really, tell me."

"Patience."

"Toda-san, I've run out of patience. If he asks one more question I'm going to strangle him. Help me!"

Toda spoke to the mama-san in Japanese. Her eyebrows rose. Toda persisted, and spoke with authority; she shrugged indulgently and left the bar, to return a few minutes later with two new ceramic mugs. Big heavy mugs for drinking cold barley tea.

Toda turned them upside down on the bar. "Feel."

The top and sides were smooth with glaze, but the bottoms were bare rough clay.

Toda put the butts together and ground them against each other. A soft, gritty sound. Grey dust sifted onto the counter. He handed the mugs to Chris. "Feel now."

The rough edges were smooth.

Toda winked. Gradually his meaning penetrated. Godzilla nodded his heavy head and wondered how to respond. Finally he took the warm sake bottle in his great paw and refilled Toda's cup. As they toasted one another Godzilla savored a pleasant vision: his giant foot grinding Hosoi into harmonious dust.

DANIEL BURKE, FSC

Wedlock

Like Eve and Adam, we are worried
that we could recklessly lose it all,
our hearts break apart,
our household fall.

This odd wrangle, of course, is foolish,
but tonight we've found no way to yield,
so we leave it fretting and tossing
beside our sleep.

Yet morning will bring a different mood:
the child will sing or we, from our
window, glimpse the prodigal garden
unfold once more.
Then carefully to loosen snags,
slowly to knit our fraying stories
into one again—and so abide,
endure, sustain.

DANIEL BURKE, FSC

Shadow

In a moment of garden sunlight
the leaf spirals
downward
slowly
its gray shadow
circling beneath
circling
deepening into black
circling
until
at the sudden
ultimate ground
they meet
and leaf and shadow are
one.

Spell

When it was something consequential,
they would dip their newspapers a bit
to spell it out softly over our heads.
We, having been left out, would sulk
a while in our curiosity and then return
to our play on the rough porch rug,
with an inkling, though, that there would be
much to learn, once we had shed our innocence.

But now in the early evening gloom
I see the children sprawling listlessly
beneath the one-eyed idol of modern
wisdom, caught by its spell-binding
exhibition of all there is to know
before or after what we used to call
the age of reason.

A Story by

ANNABEL THOMAS

Mattie's Numbers

I won't lie. I smashed Mattie's number machine. I carried it out to the road and pounded it three times with a piece of slag.

Mama, when she'd satisfied herself I'd done the deed, worried my shanks with a willow switch and Papa shook me by the shoulders till my teeth rattled. For, though God knows Mattie'd no more use for it, Sardis School was sure to ask its price out of Papa's all-but-empty pockets.

What Papa and Mama, the both of them, wanted to hear from me was: why? God's truth, if I'd known the answer, I'd have told them. At the time, though, I couldn't bring myself to study on the question long enough to figure it out. Even now, remembering all that happened is like picking the scab off a sore.

And yet it's plain to me the time's come when I need to think it through. Need to call back every part of that God-awful autumn. To recollect how I felt. To try and puzzle out why it was I did what I did.

Otherwise, that time'll keep on riding my back like a monkey. I won't ever be rid of it. Where, if I can once understand it, maybe I'll be free to go on with my life. At least that's what I hope.

To begin with, I remember how Mattie looked that October: her skin gone gauzy as an apple's touched by frost. And her body growing thinner. Always thinner.

Where she'd a mind to be was in the garden. What she'd a mind to do was push the buttons on that calculator. Day after day she watched the figures leap up against the glass window and such a sad look on her face I thought to myself it was like as if they were caged birds and her a-longing to set them free.

I recollect how strange it was to see my sister sitting still as a stone! Never jumping. Never running. Because by nature Mattie was quicksilver, rolling here, rolling there. She was an eagle in the air. A rabbit in the briars. And all my life, wherever she went, I scuddled after her.

The two of us were closer than fingers on a hand. Bad times welded us together. When the strip miners took our farm, we had to move to town. Papa got hisself a job mopping office floors. Mama commenced cooking for a restaurant on the interstate and Grampap went to live in the County Home.

It seemed to me my family leaked away like air out of a pricked balloon. All I had left was Mattie. But Mattie was plenty and enough.

My earliest memories are of Mattie telling me tales. Her favorite was the one about the Dutch boy who stuck his finger in the dike to keep out the sea. She sang me songs, too. Rhymed me rhymes. Riddled me riddles and rocked me off to sleep.

Besides which she taught me numbers.

She showed me how to make pokerback 1. Open mouth 2. Curlicue 3. Chair upsidedown 4. And a-man-took-a-walk-turned-a-somersault-and-put-his-hat-on 5. She counted for me on her fingers so that, even today, I think of numbers as sticky and moist. Rosy and warm.

Numbers was Mattie's friends. She'd learnt them of Grampap before he went away and they had for her as they'd had for him, dear familiar faces.

Wherever Mattie went, numbers followed after her. They circled her on quick, free legs, awesome and numenous as bands of angels.

Mattie took her ways through number bushes sprouting number leaves and number fruit. Walked down number hills into number valleys where number rivers washed her feet. Sometimes I wondered if somewhere, somehow my sister'd caught a glimpse of God Almighty and, finding Him full of numbers, couldn't help but see them everywhere. In everything.

Hairs on heads. Flocks of geese. Grains of wheat. Fireflies. Stars. They all sang Mattie strange hozannas. They made her face shine.

When she talked to me about numbers, strands of her hair reached out towards me like eager feelers seeking to tell me things words couldn't.

Mattie was nine and I was five when Grampap died. All in the world he had to pass along was his old plaid shirt. He left it to Mattie.

Once she'd put it on, she scarcely ever took it off. She said when she moved around inside it, notes fell from its cuffs and seams, chords dropped out of its folds: numbers, says she, turned into sweet sounds.

Because Grampap had been a fiddler. He'd played whilst the mountain folk danced. Mattie said she minded how the coons and possums used to creep from their dens to listen and how the spirits of the Indian dead came out of their burial mound to jine in the frolic.

If such was true or if it was false, I can't say. What I will say is that, at the time, it never came into my head to doubt Mattie's words. Nor I never saw my sister as different from the other kids. That happened later, the autumn I started the first grade at Sardis School. That's when, day after day, I watched the children worry my sister like a dog'll worry a cat. Peck her same as chickens'll peck a misfit bird. They pecked her and they pecked her.

Every time she walked by a bunch of them, they snickered outloud.

"You talk like a hillbilly," they told her. "You dress like a farmer!"

"Crazy Matts," they said. "Screw-loose. Button-shy. Bats!"

School was the first thing to separate Mattie and me. Our recesses were at different times so that I was always looking at her through window glass, watching her from a distance.

It was about the middle of September that Mattie commenced to feeling uncommonly tired. Too tired to jump rope. Too tired to play Kick-the-can. Too tired even for Knucklebones.

Doctor Mumford dosed her with tonic. First she improved. Then she worsened. What it was ailed her, no one could say.

Finally she left off going to school. Her teacher brought her books and lessons and, when her class started using them, the calculator. The teacher showed her how all the numbers was shut up inside and how wonderful

well-behaved they was in there. How they done what they was told. Done what was expected of them.

After that, when I came home from school, I'd always find my sister in the garden working that machine. All around her stood the flowers our Mama'd planted, like she'd used to do at the farm: black-eyed susans and yarrow. Columbine and sweet William. Phlox and bachelor's buttons. Overgrown and unkempt, they bloomed and faded. And bloomed again. At her feet yellow jackets, black-striped, numberless, buzzing, fed on the fallen pears. But Mattie never looked at them. She only looked at the machine.

By and by her arms and legs took on a stiff hard feel since she'd less of flesh to cover her bones. Her hair bleached out in the sun and her skin bronzed.

In November Dr. Mumford sent Mattie to live at the hospital in Tapp City. Mama and Papa drove in to sit with her, trading off, mostly, now one, now the other. Each time, I begged to go along but they'd never let me.

Weeks passed. Snow fell. Melted. Fell again and stayed. More and more I felt a most awful aching to look on my sister's face. The need lay across my chest like an iron bar. I got so I couldn't scarcely draw my breath. Or sit or stand or eat or sleep.

Finally the day came when Mama and Papa took me with them. We started for Tapp City early in the evening, A grey fog had risen from the ground and swallowed the sun. We had to go slow. We had to creep and crawl.

I couldn't stand it. I couldn't wait. I bounced on the seat. I kicked the floor trying to make the car go faster.

"She'll likely look some changed to you," Papa said. "She's dreadful sick, Roberta."

I didn't listen. In my head I was saying to Mattie, "When are you coming home?" And she was saying back, "Today! We'll ride back together."

All the way to Tapp City I pressed my forehead hard against the window watching the road flush back under the wheels like water. My muscles ached from moving us along. From drawing us forward.

The fog, rolling off the highway, drew itself into walls on either side. In front. Behind. The wall before us melted as we reached it and built itself again further on. And further on.

The dashboard lit us, three people in a row, with a queer greenish light as if we sat under the sea.

"We're almost there," I kept saying. "We're almost there."

My voice lilted out over the motor-sound. I was full of joy. Full of excitement. My palms were wet and my mouth dry. I couldn't, *couldn't* wait!

Full night fell before we reached Tapp City and drove into the hospital parking lot. By then the fog was breaking up. Shreds of it hung in the air, waist-high. It wrapped itself around the streetlights like layers of gauze. The hospital was tall and heavy-looking. It had many lighted windows.

We crossed the lobby. Our shoesoles squeaked on the tile floor. We rode up in the elevator. When the doors rolled back, I broke away from Mama and Papa and hurried away. Rooms opened off the corridor on both sides. I ran down the hall poking my head in each room. I saw people in beds but none of them was my sister.

"Mattie!" I shouted, frantic now and not to be stopped. Not caring who heard me. "Mattie!"

At the end of the hall I found a closed door. I turned the knob. Opened it a slit. Then wider, until, putting my eye to the crack, I could see a row of beds and a head on each pillow. In the farthest bed by the window I spied Mattie, narrow under a white cover.

I slipped through the door. Crossed the room. Drew near the bed, keeping my eyes on Mattie's face. She lay still as still. She seemed to sleep.

I watched her breath pass, soundless, in and out at her open mouth, lifting the ends of her hair where it lay spread across her pillow.

I was close enough now to touch her but I didn't reach out. Nor I didn't say to her the things I'd meant to say. Instead, my jaw dropped down.

Because I saw that Mattie's arms and legs, her nose and chest were fastened to tubes and wires that were sucking her up into boxes hung on the wall over her head, turning her into lines and dots and numbers pulsing behind glass windows.

Just as Mama and Papa came up behind me, Mattie sighed. She shifted her head. Her lids twitched open. I leaned forward and looked into her eyes. They were hollow and deep as two wells.

All the long way home, I stared at the mileage gauge on the dashboard. Whenever the last number got to nine, it rolled over and zero came up. And the next number turned and when it was zero, the next turned and on across the gauge. Every number shift took Mattie further away from me. And further away.

Staring at the gauge, I felt my eyes glaze over like ice coming on a pond.

Two weeks later, Mattie died in the hospital the same way Grampap had died in the County Home: out of my sight and far off.

The day they told me she was gone was the day I busted the calculator. But, truth to tell, even now, after I've remembered all that led up to it, I still can't say exactly why.

Out of grief? Out of anger and despair? Yes, but there was more to it than that.

Maybe to get back at Sardis School for what it did to Mattie. Or because I judged it was what Mattie longed to do those autumn days but was too weak.

The one thing I recall for sure is that whilst I was busting Mattie's number box I felt like the Dutch boy, only in reverse.

I mean that where he was plugging up a hole, I felt I was making one.

Sometimes yet, I think about that hole I made and I wonder if it might still be there because once in a great while when I lie on my back awake late at night it seems to me I hear the faintest of trickling sounds and I think maybe that's Mattie coming back like the sea.

○○○○

A Story by

SEAMUS O'HALLURAIN

Tomorrow is Another Day

"Agatha, could you see where Miss Kitty is and bring her in?" asked Monsignor Patrick McCaffery anxiously.

Agatha ladled steaming snapper soup into monsignor's plate and then left the assistant pastor, Fr. Francis Frixone, to look after himself as she went to seek out the cat.

The two men took their soup in silence. But the silence was only where conversation was concerned. McCaffery ate his soup as noisily as a camel ingesting water before a long voyage across a burning desert. So many things about the florid-faced McCaffery irked Frixone now. At first, with his career in mind, he had done his utmost to relate to this unresponsive pastor, even accompanied him voluntarily to Rome on an arduous pilgrimage and done most of the donkey work.

On their return to Kennedy Airport, the monsignorial bags failed to arrive. McCaffery complained at the Pan American desk. The girl attending made inquiries and informed him that, unfortunately, the bags had been left in Rome, but would be procured as soon as possible.

"But I'm a MONSIGNOR!" he stormed.

Looking nonplussed, the girl shrugged her shoulders slightly, "Nevertheless, sir, your bags are *still* in Rome."

Frixone stifled a guffaw. That was his first slip. He seemed to find the situation amusing. McCaffery glared at him. "Ahem ... sorry, monsignor."

Frixone went on to make other "mistakes." It wasn't long since Vatican II had ended and he had some wonderful ideas for putting on a "sizzling" liturgy. A mime at the offertory, for example. He also encouraged some people who wanted to start a prayer group to do so. What could possibly be wrong with people coming together to pray and do some good? But the monsignor did not consider it a bright idea and how dare he, a mere assistant, still wet behind the ears, question an experienced pastor's wisdom. Neither did he consider it a good idea "to turn the Holy Mass into a barn dance."

"Dignified mime, a barn dance? Give me a break, will ya, monsignor?"

"A break," mused McCaffery later. These young fellows had had all the breaks as far as he could see. The seminary was wide open nowadays. "Liberty Hall" he called it. And the seminarians mixed with women in a "healthy" way. Whatever that might mean. It was totally different in his times. They were confined behind the walls of St. Anselm's and were encouraged to amputate women from their lives. They were regaled with stories of heroic mortification like the one that told how St. Aloysius Gonzaga refused to look at his mother's face. And there was Italian-born Fr. Picca, professor of sexual morality, who warned students against the snares of the opposite sex by

saying that woman should not be called *donna* (woman), but rather *danno* (divilment ... imagine!).

Mother of God, was it any wonder that he was emotionally crippled. Agatha was the only woman that he felt any way comfortable with. Passion didn't enter into the relationship when they were younger, because such as it was, the seminary had done its work only too well in turning him into an emotional eunuch, and Agatha, God love her, had the Irish immigrant's deep awe for the priest. Now that they were both advanced in years, the relationship, like an old shoe, didn't pinch at any point.

But Miss Kealy, the parish secretary he had inherited at St. John Chrysostom, now that was an entirely different matter. How the neat little buttocks and breasts disturbed him even now in his latter years. He took refuge in averted looks, which gave him a shifty appearance, and flight. "Flight" was the old seminary catchword. Where temptations to chastity were concerned, there was no standing and fighting, you flew (or was it "fled"?) as before a forest fire. Life was further complicated by Agatha's not liking Miss Kealy. The resulting stilted conversation between pastor and secretary made her job extremely difficult. He admitted it. Besides, she could be forgiven for thinking that for some reason or other she couldn't fathom, he didn't care very much for her.

The situation was quite the contrary with Frixone. He greeted "Caitlin," if you don't mind, warmly each day and on special occasions gave her a most natural kiss and hug. God, how he envied him his ease in social relationships. As for himself, he just rotted alone up in that room watching, for the most part, vacuous television programs and probably drinking too much.

As a result of the airport incident and the liturgy debacle, an awkwardness grew up between the two men, and the monsignor ceased to address his perplexed assistant directly. And as if being frozen out by McCaffery weren't enough, Frixone felt that Agatha also grew cool and curt with him and would never use a word where a grunt would do. To his way of thinking, the effect seemed way out of proportion to the cause. He told his confidante, the retired Fr. Muldoon, as much. Since being an altar boy, he had a great affection for Fr. Muldoon, felt he owed him his vocation. "Ah, poor auld Pat," said the sunny-haired Muldoon compassionately, "The bags and liturgy are the least of it. They are only symptoms of his feelings on the one hand and triggers on the other. He's glarin' at ye across epochs. That's the real problem. Frank, the time has come for you to call upon your considerable resilience."

The soup finished, the two clerics sat in tense silence. McCaffery's considerable stomach gurgled and growled like an active volcano. Although he had had a heart bypass, he couldn't endure the Spartan diet prescribed. Broccoli, carrots, celery and radishes were, he declared, for rabbits, and tucked right back into his ice cream.

After what seemed an age, Agatha appeared with a ginger cat. A great fat thing. McCaffery received Miss Kitty on his lap and stroked her gently. Purring softly, like a Rolls Royce, she seemed to gaze towards Frixone with slit, contemptuous eyes. The main course came. Chicken again. Miss Kitty was put on the floor where, for a moment, the legs supported the huge bulk

uncertainly. Agatha served monsignor. Frixone fended for himself. Miss Kitty mewed insistently for tidbits and was occasionally rewarded from the monsignor's dish.

The two men waited in silence for the dessert beneath an impressive chandelier. Indeed the dining room with its long mahogany table, mahogany chairs with deep red upholstery, wood panelling and tear-drop chandeliers spoke of the days when St. John Chrysostom was a flourishing Irish-Italian parish with a bustling rectory served by six priests. But now the sheen had gone off everything. The smoky dullness of the chandeliers and paint beginning to peel here and there from the ceiling now gave the room an atmosphere of faded elegance, which was heightened by all the empty chairs round the table. Indeed McCaffery could remember his predecessor, old Monsignor O'Flaherty, holding court over a full house of residents and guests from where he now sat forlorn. The parish, however, was now heavily populated by blacks, most of whom were Baptists. McCaffery did his best in a paternalistic way to reach out to his parishioners, but admitted that he found it difficult to relate to "colored" people. He also found it difficult to cope with the ousting of the statue of St. Patrick by that of St. Martin de Porres. He was not of course prejudiced, on that he was adamant, but each to his own. The "colored" people actually preferred it that way, he believed.

As he sat gazing at the fraying paint on the ceiling, Frixone was pondering the enigma that was McCaffery. To be fair to him, he had always served his parishioners dutifully in a priestly way down the years. He was an impeccable "priest." It was as a human being that he became unstuck, as those assistants who had worked with him well knew. Talk about a street angel! If the monsignor were to speak to him right now, he would of course reply eagerly, but McCaffery never seemed to be able to recover from the accumulated trauma of the "sneering" at the airport and the "hurdy-gurdy" of the liturgy and prayer group. But maybe the root of the malaise went much deeper, as Fr. Muldoon hinted. Despite everything though, he, the assistant, was ready to swallow his pride and talk to the monsignor. After all, he had his career to think about. He just reveled in the ceremonies and solemnities of the Church. He was also fascinated by its honors and pecking order and in his fantasies would picture himself as a bishop one day, if not a full-blown bishop, then at least an auxiliary. In terms of power, of course, being an auxiliary was often about as relevant as being the fifth teat on a cow. Yet there was no denying it, a bishop was a bishop. For a moment he had a satisfying vision of himself processing out of the local cathedral, scattering triple blessings like confetti on reverently bowed heads.

At worst he hoped to become a monsignor. Monsignors sure looked impressive in full regalia and they usually were pastors, had a power base. So he must play his cards properly, not blot his copy book, not rock the boat—all that sort of thing. And that was why he had to take all this crap from McCaffery, his faithful Agatha, and even from that damned snob, Miss Kitty.

He felt as though he were trapped in the jaws of a tacit conspiracy. If he could get patiently through this assignment, perhaps the next would be better. Lord, but it was frustrating, not to say humiliating. What was it all doing to his self respect. What did he not suffer because of ambition. Yes, he was

ambitious. He readily admitted it. But it wasn't crude ambition for ambition's sake. It was holy ambition. After all, being ordained a bishop meant receiving the fullness of the priesthood—a praiseworthy goal, surely. And he would use power to do some good. There were those who exercised subtle control over mind and heart to achieve their ends. The manipulation of friends was not for him. He'd be up front or nothing. Besides the desire to get up there was truly American. "Excelsior," the poet had said. It was, of course, a very human desire too. What's the old saying? Oh yes, when ten new monsignors got the purple, a hundred got the blues.

The truth was that nearly everybody was partial towards preferment. Few indeed showed the suicidal tendencies of the much loved Charlie Swartz. He had to laugh again at the daring of it. Just imagine, the Archbishop at the Holy Thursday Mass of Chrism droning a prayer "for me your unworthy servant, James, and my assistant bishops Aloysius and Francis." Then from the midst of the concelebrating priests up pipes the anonymous voice of Charlie, "equally unworthy." Ah, the dessert at last. He had been quite carried away by idle reveries.

So as to allow the food to settle, McCaffery ordained an appropriate lapse of time between the main course and the dessert. Agatha spooned ice cream onto McCaffery's plate and topped it tastily with chocolate. Frixone helped himself. Would Monsignor like some coffee, the housekeeper inquired. No thanks. "Come here, my dainty Miss Kitty," said McCaffery. "Have you been chasing squirrels?" Picturing the "dainty" Miss Kitty chasing squirrels, Frixone nearly had to bite off his tongue to stop himself from exploding with laughter. "Naughty, naughty, Miss Kitty," continued the monsignor. "And what are you doing tomorrow? You don't know. Well, I'll be saying the 11 o'clock Mass. It's Sunday, you little infidel. And what will Fr. Frixone be doing, Miss Kitty? Oh, Fr. Frixone will be saying the 8 and 9 Masses. This afternoon he heard confessions from 3 to 4. Well that's not quite correct, because you saw him enter the church at 3:15, isn't that so, Miss Kitty? What did you think of that, tabby? You didn't approve! My, but aren't you the organized and disciplined cat and without seminary training too. Maybe you're better off. All they seem to get in the seminary nowadays is liturgical dance, guitars, and plenty of old talk about "self-fulfillment,", not "self-sacrifice," mark you. For ordination, I remember I got a present of a Mass kit. Today they get all sorts of machines with things hanging out of them. Ah well, times change. The only consoling thing is that God is unchanging and that's why me an' you must hold the fort, isn't it, Miss Kitty? After all, they may not see our likes again."

"To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often," blurted Frixone, unable to contain himself for another second. "And that's Cardinal Newman."

"Is it now?" parried McCaffery, surprised by this unwonted intervention. He stood up. Miss Kitty, anticipating his exit, strolled regally to the door with tail held aloft.

"You don't seem to think much of Cardinal Newman's dictum, do you, Miss Kitty?" said McCaffery and followed her out.

Later, monsignor was relaxing with a beer, watching television in the room adjoining his bedroom. Agatha fussed over him. Having removed his shoes, she was now helping him to get on his bedroom slippers.

"How do you rate Fr. Spaghetti, Agatha?"

To his satisfaction, she just raised her eyes to heaven in Celtic conspiracy with him.

"Ah shure, don't be too hard on the unfortunate angashore, Agatha. He doesn't seem to be too happy. Hardly a word out of him at dinner. Poor fella seems to have a communication problem. Which is amazing really, because the seminary is wide open nowadays—to women an' everything. But maybe that's precisely the problem, too much exposure and then these young buckos find celibacy a burden. I've always said meself that high walls are a great assist to celibacy."

Agatha helped him to light his pipe.

"If he had any sense, he'd ask the bishop for a change. Mind you, I'm not going to do anything to give him the push. I never do in cases like this. They'd say I can't get on with me assistants."

"Give it time and he'll ask for a move," volunteered Agatha, well aware of patterns. She usually went along with everything monsignor said. She had been a priest's housekeeper since arriving from Ireland as a demure and prepossessing young girl all of forty summers before. Twenty-five long years she had devoted to Monsignor. Sometimes from an upstairs window she gazed long at the children playing in the park opposite until, at last, sighing deeply she retired downstairs to her childless kitchen.

Having been given his weekend program via Miss Kitty, as usual, Frixone was back in his own room. The wear-and-tear of his lack of relationship with McCaffery was beginning to tell. He gazed blankly at a wall. A television set flickered in the corner, yet he paid no heed. This scenario was becoming all too frequent. It was two years since his ordination. For a time he had been on a high. Now, with the honeymoon over, he began to feel the true weight of his commitment. Ahead stretched long and lonely years. Loneliness was inseparable from the human condition whatever the calling, but the priest was forever vowed to a solitary bed. He could literally feel his heart sinking and depression take a grip on him. But then, he shook himself out of his brooding with the realization that madness lay that way. "I'll think of all that tomorrow. I can stand it then." He uttered the defiant words of Scarlett O'Hara, finding that they echoed his sentiments exactly. He had read the novel about ten times.

2

There was no further tolerating Fr. Alvarez, his assistant pastor, the monsignor concluded. He was upsetting the parishioners wholesale with his liberation theology, option for the poor, and pacifism. Pacifism, for God's sake, in an area where many gained their livelihood from the manufacture of Patriot missiles. Nothing would do him on his last day off but to go up to Washington, DC, and protest the Gulf War. It must be enough to drive George Bush to broccoli. There were better things one could do on a day off. Play

the machines in Atlantic City for one. The guy was a sucker for punishment. Fancy telling the few who ventured into the parish from exclusive Forest Boulevard to undo themselves of their wealth and opt for the simple lifestyle of Christ. He laughed aloud at the very idea. "Save yourselves," sez he to those millionaires, "by saving others. Be content with having enough." Enough. What was enough? One person's "enough" was a simple home and job, another's a townhouse, a country mansion, and a yacht on the Caribbean as well. Wasn't last Sunday the limit. The delegation that went round to the sacristy to protest his sermon was fit to be tied.

Imagine ironically telling the pillars of the parish to take the gospel and cross out all the bits they didn't like, so that he could avoid preaching on them in the future. True, he livened up the liturgy and was good with groups, but everything was blighted by his Bolshy approach to justice. No, there was no wearing this. The poor spic was out of his depth. He would see the bishop and have him transferred, for his own good of course. It wasn't as if he was driving him out. Oh no, he could never do that. Fortunately, the bishop was a sound conservative, recently appointed by Rome. He didn't anticipate problems. However, he would talk to Fr. Alvarez before the day was out. He felt he owed him that. He was, after all, a zealous if misguided priest.

"Fr. Alvarez," he began, "first of all let me say quite definitely that I do appreciate your zeal and commitment to this parish."

"But nevertheless, Monsignor Frixone, you're going to ask the bishop to move me," interposed Alvarez.

"Well ... er ... yes," bumbled the monsignor, somewhat taken aback. "It's ... er ... for your own good."

"You needn't be embarrassed, I saw it coming."

"You did badly upset some of the pillars of the parish, you know."

"Jesus upset some of the pillars of the parish in his day too," countered Alvarez quietly.

"There you go, the typical idealist, speedily grabbing the high moral ground. But analyze your appeal to the people not to have anything to do with the manufacture of Patriot missiles, for example. We're living in times of great unemployment, father. Factories are being relocated in the Third World, where the people have to work for starvation wages. What are our good people supposed to eat? Protest placards?"

"Some of our bishops have started funds to help people who opt out, until they can find alternative employment."

"Aha, if pigs could only fly! That seems a very precarious basis on which to give up a job."

"But the bottom line is that it is wrong to produce those weapons of mass destruction."

"That's according to you. There are those who argue otherwise. If only you could tone down your rhetoric a bit, be a little more careful and reasonable in what you say ..."

"Monsignor, I can't do that. It's not that I enjoy confrontation. It's just that I have to say what I believe to be true."

"That's why I think you could do with a change. Look, you're a young man, this is your first assignment. Allowances will be made for your youth and

inexperience. What I'm trying to say is that this may do little harm to your career."

"Career be damned!" Alvarez blazed momentarily. "I have no interest in preferment. I'll not sell my soul for a mess of potage."

These last words and the emphasis on the "my" had a devastating effect on Frixone. It was as if a boxer were cruising to a comfortable win on points when suddenly his head is whiplashed with a stunning blow to the jaw. In a thrice the positions of the contestants are irrevocably reversed.

"Who could sell their soul for a mess of potage?" Frixone struggled to sound casual.

Alvarez was silent.

"Who could do so?" persisted Monsignor Frixone.

Again Alvarez said nothing and his silence was tearing the scales from the old man's eyes more effectively than a million words. Was this how others saw him? As an unprincipled climber? He felt absolutely mortified. "You owe me an answer," he said in a shaken voice.

With utter yet lethal integrity, Alvarez replied softly, "I'm not required to be judge to any man."

Frixone felt as though his whole insides had been gutted. He was tottering on the ropes. He struggled to rally. "There's no room for sentiment. You must go. It's a matter of princip..." But an ultimate honesty was undoing him and the words died on his lips. Totally devoid of conviction, they echoed hollowly in the shell of his being. Of a sudden he was old and lost.

Alvarez silently left the room.

As Monsignor Frixone shuffled towards his bedroom, the housekeeper, Clara Maria, called from the bottom of the stairs, "Dunna forgot to take you medicine, monsignore." He looked trance-like at the figure standing below. A quarter of a century fell away and there was Agatha. "And again the wasted years," he whispered to himself with a heart full of tears.

"You all right?"

"Yes ... yes," he said falteringly and retired.

Clara Maria looked worried. "Is that Alvarez upsettin' monsignore again."

He looked at his reflection in a mirror. The hair was a dull gray and the face had long settled into satisfied and compromised folds. Then he confronted the photograph of himself as a lean young assistant to Monsignor McCaffery. The earnest youthful eyes gazed at him across the years. He groaned. "Did you get it wrong?" he asked his younger self. "Was the price too high?"

For what seemed an age, he just stood dejectedly like a dog that had been whipped ... "Frank, the time has come for you to call on your considerable resilience," a beloved and unexpected voice eventually echoed from the past. Gradually he drew himself up to his full height and cried out: "I'll think of all that tomorrow. I can stand it then. After all, tomorrow is another day."

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KALIDAS MISRA, who teaches at Tripura University, India, spent seven months at La Salle as a Fulbright Fellow. He was doing research on the scholarly resources found in *The Imaginative Representations of the Vietnam War Collection* housed in the Rare Book and Manuscript Department of the Connelly Library.

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ANNABEL THOMAS returns to these pages after too long an absence. She received the Iowa Short Fiction Award for her collection, *The Phototropic Woman*. Two of her stories were selected for O. Henry Awards, and four of her stories were picked for the PEN Syndicated Fiction Project.

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Four Quarters

(ISSN-0015-9107)
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Phila., Pa. 19141-1199